

Casey Quinn: Six Rounds Against Cancer, and Counting

Like Krauer and Riley, Quinn is no stranger to the flip side of lifesaving cancer treatment. His battle with cancer began in 1994, when at the age of 17, he went to his doctor with severe and mysterious gastrointestinal symptoms. He underwent a battery of tests, but it was only when doctors performed a colonoscopy that they found numerous polyps in his intestine -- evidence of colon cancer.



Casey Quinn has battled cancer many times -- each time he has won.

Surgeons originally believed that they could rid Quinn's body of cancer with surgery alone. But shortly after he began seeing doctors for treatment of his colon cancer, he noticed a pain in the back of his pelvis. A subsequent medical scan revealed yet another cancer, this one in the bone of his right hip.

"That was pretty frightening," Quinn said. "That's when it turned from just colon surgery to, 'OK, now it's really bad.'"

He now faced surgery, radiation and a strong chemotherapy regimen. Recalling the chemo, Quinn notes, "It was nasty -- really, really nasty side effects." The 6-foot-3 Quinn went from 150 pounds to 115 pounds over the course of his treatment.

Meanwhile, the surgery to remove the bone tumor in his hip left him with severe damage to his sciatic nerve, which extends down the right leg. While the surgery to remove the cancer from his hip was a success, Quinn said the pain in his foot and leg from the damaged nerve was nearly unbearable.

But the cancer, at least, seemed to be behind him. Quinn graduated from high school in 1996, and life seemed to return to normal as he headed to college. But he still checked in at the Mayo Clinic periodically for routine checkups. And it was during one of these checkups, in October of 1998, that his next battle with cancer began.

"That one showed a spot in my right heel, on the same side as the tumor had been in my pelvis," he said. "I'll never forget the feeling of that biopsy in my heel."

The biopsy came back positive. And this time doctors felt that the location of the tumor in his bone, combined with the low likelihood that chemo would eliminate the cancer a second time, necessitated a more radical approach. They told Quinn his best chance involved amputating his leg.

At first he said no. "I was just reacting -- overreacting maybe," he said. "It was just the most shocking thing in my life.

"The next day, some switch went off in me and I decided, 'Of course I have to do this.'"

Doctors took Quinn's right leg below his knee to prevent the cancer's spread. For years, Quinn was cancer free. But in 2007 Quinn once again began experiencing unusual symptoms in the form of what he believed to be panic attacks.

He saw a psychiatrist, who agreed that panic attacks were to blame for what Quinn calls "mad rushes" that he would get. His psychiatrist put him on anxiety medicines, which worked at first. But then the attacks got worse.

The true answer to his condition came when he visited his oncologist and had an MRI scan of his brain.

"Bam, there's a golf ball-sized tumor in there," he said.

In an operation that Quinn refers to as "round six" in his fight against cancer, surgeons at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Tex., delicately removed the areas of the tumor that they could without damaging critical areas of his brain. However, they were only able to eliminate 85 percent of this tumor. And while radiation and chemotherapy initially kept the remainder of it in check, Quinn said that his most recent scans suggest that this tumor may be growing once more.

"So that was round six, and I'm waiting for round seven," he said.

But along with the repeated encounters with cancer, Quinn said he also gained insight into his condition. He was eventually diagnosed with [Li-Fraumeni syndrome](#), a condition which dramatically increased his risk of developing a host of cancers. But while he said that based on his experience, he would recommend that any childhood cancer survivor keep up with regular screenings.

"I either go in and have the checkup, or I live my life not knowing. The prior of these two leaves me with much more comfort," he said.

"If [the results] are good, I go on living my life," he said. "If it's bad, I start treatment and have a much better result."