

flourish

A creative magazine by and for the cancer community



Please
leave me
where you
found me

● How do you feel about your body? Our contributors answer

● The Big C and the Big O: The power of pleasure in cancer recovery

● Ink and Healing: Discover restorative tattooing

● The body explored through painting, poetry, sculpture, photography and more

THE BODY ISSUE

flourish

Flourish Magazine is a joint venture between integrative cancer care charity Yes to Life and creative health charity Artlift and funded by Arts Council England, aiming to explore the benefits of an integrative and creative approach to living with cancer.

The magazine is created with the support of a steering group that includes people living with cancer and partners Macmillan, Macmillan Next Steps and Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust.

It features a range of creative responses, expert information and interviews in each themed edition that offer support and represent the diversity of the cancer community.

Artlift

artlift.org

Artlift is a Gloucestershire based specialist creative health charity co-producing projects and courses for people living with mental health challenges, long-term chronic pain and/or who are living with or moving on from cancer.

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Instagram [@ArtsOnPrescription](https://www.instagram.com/ArtsOnPrescription)

Facebook [@ArtstoMakeYouFeelBetter](https://www.facebook.com/ArtstoMakeYouFeelBetter)

Yes to Life

yestolife.org.uk

Yes to Life is the UK's integrative cancer care charity, which empowers people with cancer to make informed decisions about their care options. For well over a decade, we have provided evidence-based information to those in need.

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Thanks to The Cancer Hive for the inspiration.

The Body Issue

Hello and welcome to the fifth issue of Flourish Magazine, a magazine by and for the cancer community from integrative cancer care charity Yes to Life and creative health charity Artlift, who are based in Gloucestershire.

This issue's theme – 'Body' – is one we've wanted to do for a while. For those living with cancer, the body can be hostile territory. Whether or not you felt happy in your body before, cancer brings a new lens to our flesh and bones. Perhaps you feel like your body is against you. Perhaps you feel vulnerable or fragile in a way you didn't before. Or perhaps the opposite, and it's actually connected you to your body for the first time.

Bodies can be unpredictable, unyielding, they can be places of shame and they can be places of joy, and all of this can be very hard to talk about. And yet the candidness, humour, creativity and courage of the submissions in this issue offer something that I'm sure everyone can relate to, cancer or no cancer, and it has been an honour to receive them.

As always, our astoundingly talented contributors have

brought their creative interpretations of the body – in all shapes and sizes (pun intended). This issue we cover sex, ageing, hair, clothes, body love, body hatred, body awareness – with everything from poetry to sculpture to photography and more.

We aim to show the breadth, diversity and truth of the cancer experience, meaning that some of the content we've featured will be dark and challenging in tone. We have provided content warnings throughout, so that readers can choose what they feel able to engage with. At the back of the magazine you'll find a list of Resources that offer support to those living with cancer, alongside our Submission Call Out for Issue 6 – on the theme of 'Mind'. Submissions are open to all of those with lived experience with cancer – this might be yourself, through your work or through your loved ones. See even more content from our contributors on the Artlift and Yes to Life websites, where the magazine is also available to read for free.

If you have a moment, we'd love it if you could tell us what you thought of the magazine in our short survey by scanning the QR code on the back cover.

Thank you for reading!

Natalie Beech
Editor-in-Chief

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How do you feel about your body?

In each issue of Flourish we ask our contributors to anonymously answer a question surrounding the theme.

In this issue, exploring the Body, this is what they said...

"I feel extremely grateful for my body, every imperfect bit of it!"



"I feel my body is fragile."



"I am truly amazed at how resilient the body is and how quickly it heals after undergoing surgical trauma. It took a diagnosis for me to fully feel gratitude toward my body and appreciate the new me every day."

"Scars are a Warrior's beauty marks, so embrace them proudly as a proof of survival and healing."



"I am trying to love my body absolutely and unconditionally, to scrape away all the judgments – too thin, too fat, too flat, too noticeable, too wobbly, too saggy – that I have absorbed and repeated for far too long."

"My body is fighting against me."

"I am proud of my body, the battles it has fought and, so far, won."

"I feel my body sometimes lets me down, but it's the only one I've got so I work at keeping it as strong and healthy as I can."

"I love my body."



"My body is what the world sees but only I know what goes on in my mind!"

"I think that my body is incredible and I feel great tenderness and gratitude for it."

"Love/hate. In awe of what it's survived but bewildered that it won't give in or stop trying to kill me!"





Ink and Healing: The Transformative Impact of Restorative Tattooing

By Lucy J Turner

For fifteen years, tattoo artist Tanya Buxton has transformed her passion for ink into a career that merges art and healing. Tanya first began tattooing in 2009 and since then has developed a unique niche in the world of tattooing, blending creativity with a deep sense of purpose.

Tattooing has always been more than just a job for Tanya. From a young age, she envisioned a future in the art form, captivated by its rich history and cultural significance. "Tattooing was my first love," she reflects. "It's not just an art form; it's a way to express freedom and creativity."

In 2015, Tanya expanded her expertise into cosmetic tattooing, more commonly known as permanent

makeup. This includes tattoos for eyebrows, eyeliner, and lips. This shift opened up a new client base—those who may not have considered a traditional tattoo but sought the benefits of cosmetic tattooing. More importantly, it set the stage for Tanya to explore restorative tattooing.

Restorative tattooing, such as areola and nipple tattoos, quickly became a significant part of Tanya's work. Initially, she was aware of these procedures but had not fully considered their potential. However, her involvement with the cancer community highlighted the critical need for these tattoos. "I knew I could offer something more realistic and permanent," she says. "It's about helping people regain a sense of normalcy and control over their bodies."

These tattoos serve a variety of purposes. For individuals who have undergone mastectomies, nipple tattoos can disguise scars, celebrate survival, or help reclaim one's body. "Tattooing can signify a new chapter, a new form of creative expression that helps people feel whole again," Tanya explains. "It's about giving them confidence and helping them embrace their new reality." These tattoos are not just about aesthetics; they play a huge role in the emotional and psychological recovery for many individuals.

For many, especially

those in the cancer community, tattoos are more than just a visual statement; they are intertwined with their experiences and emotions. Tattoos can be a way to embrace the journey through cancer, the skin becoming a canvas to transform scars into symbols of strength and resilience.

Tanya says a lot of her clients use tattoos as a way to reclaim a sense of control and autonomy after facing life's challenges. By choosing designs that resonate with their personal narratives, they turn their bodies into living artworks, reasserting their body confidence both physically and emotionally. "Modern tattooing is no longer about selecting a pre-designed image from a book," it is a bespoke process where artists collaborate closely with clients to create unique, meaningful pieces that reflect their stories. Each tattoo becomes a form of creative expression and a celebration of overcoming adversity, making the skin not just a medium, but a masterpiece.

In addition to areola tattoos, Tanya also specializes in 3D belly button



tattoos. These are used to restore the appearance of a belly button after surgeries or complications. This expertise highlights the versatility of tattooing in medical and restorative contexts. "The possibilities are endless," she says. "From scars and burns to vitiligo and cosmetic surgeries, restorative tattooing can profoundly impact someone's life."

Opening Paradise Tattoo Studio in Cheltenham was a significant milestone. The studio is designed to challenge traditional tattoo studio stereotypes. "Paradise is warm, inviting, and inclusive," says Tanya. "It's not just about getting a tattoo; it's about having a positive and empowering experience." Paradise Tattoo Studio's atmosphere reflects Tanya's belief that the tattoo experience should be memorable and uplifting. "I want people to feel cared for and valued," she explains. "Paradise is a safe space where everyone feels welcome and supported."

A groundbreaking achievement in Tanya's career was becoming the first tattoo artist employed by the NHS at Kingston's oncology department. The role integrates tattooing into mainstream Cancer medical care, acknowledging its significance in the recovery process. "The NHS recognizing the need for restorative tattooing is a huge step forward," she says. "I'm proud to be part



of this pioneering effort."

Tanya also collaborates with private healthcare providers like Nuffield and HCA Healthcare, further expanding the reach of restorative tattooing. With every tattoo, Tanya witnesses the impact of her work, seeing how these tattoos help people reclaim their confidence and sense of self. "Being able to do what I love every day and make a real difference in people's lives is incredibly rewarding," she reflects. "It's not just about the ink; it's about the healing and empowerment that comes with it."

With every design, Tanya continues to transform lives, demonstrating the deep impact of tattooing on both physical appearance and emotional wellbeing. Through her work, Tanya has shown how the art of tattooing can be a powerful tool for recovery and self-empowerment, proving that tattoo ink can indeed be a catalyst for profound personal change.

Find out more about Tanya and Paradise Tattoo Studio on their website paradisetattoostudios.com or by following them on Instagram [@paradise_cheltenham](https://www.instagram.com/paradise_cheltenham)



Flipping the Vogue

By Roshani Pietersz

In life's grand parade, we take the stage,
Flipping the Vogue, turning the page.
With skin that sizzles at sun's mere glance,
And teeth gone skew-whiff in a merry dance.

Eyebrows vanish, a disappearing act,
Yet in their absence, we find a pact.
To laugh at mirror's whimsical jest,
For beauty is defined by the heart, not the crest.

Cancer's cameo, a twist in the tale,
Yet through its grip, we set sail.
On waves of humour, we ride the storm,
In the face of adversity, we transform.

So here's to the body, imperfect and true,
In its flaws lies a story, both old and new.
Flipping the Vogue, with a wink and a smile,
For in every trial, we find our style.



Artwork and Words by Lesley Cox

I am a mixed race, disabled, self-taught artist from Salford. Six years ago I had thyroid cancer, the tumour was removed along with half of my thyroid. They have since found another tumour which is being monitored.

Art has been therapeutic for me; a life line. This piece (acrylic on canvas) is a representation of the chaos of my dysfunctional body. The lines of gold leaf are my glimmer of hope.



When the dancing stops

Photography and Words by Michelle Field

I have never been so tired. A tiredness that does not ease with rest. A tiredness that seems to come from somewhere deep down and where sleep does not come easily. A heaviness pulling. I can feel it through my feet, I can feel it in my thoughts, it's like a dark cloud. Sometimes the light breaks through, if I'm quick enough I can reach out. I can be me for a moment. But all too quickly it returns, and I wonder if I will ever be myself again.



When the dancing stops and the colours dim, at times it feels like it won't be the same again. But the stillness gives way to new motivations. The silence allows for more thoughts to be heard and calmness brings clarity. I'm not sure

I want to go back. In some ways, I like this new normal. If only the exhaustion would disappear, I would feel lighter. Maybe then I will dance again.

Soon the light will come, and it will stay. Soon the heaviness will lift, energies

will grow and the steps will once again have rhythm. These things will happen soon, I just need to reconsider what soon is.

See more of Michelle's work on her website at michellefield.format.com



This piece contains references to surgery that some readers may find difficult. If you're in need of support, please see the resources section at the back of the magazine.



New Fatty Apron

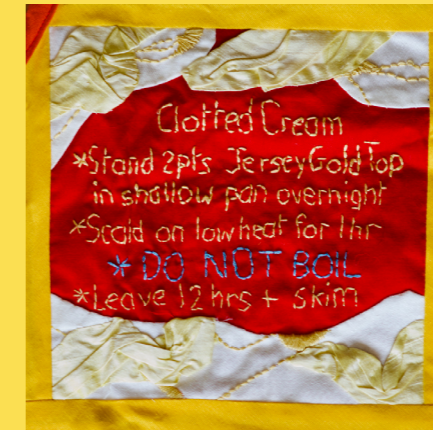
Textiles and Words
by Nicola Ramsden

"Oh, and we're going to remove your Fatty Apron." My what? My Fatty Apron? What on earth are they talking about? - I don't think I've got one of those!

The first time I became aware of the existence of the omentum, also known as the fatty apron, was when I found out I was about to lose mine. I'd been diagnosed with Stage 3c ovarian cancer and was having a meeting with the surgeon who would be operating on me, carrying out a full hysterectomy, appendectomy, peritonectomy and, well - Fatty Apronectomy.

While waiting for the day of the surgery to arrive, that name - Fatty Apron - kept popping into my head. I looked it up on the internet of course, found pictures of it, and learned that its function isn't fully understood. I started to think - I want a new Fatty Apron, I'm going to make one!

The picture that began to form in my mind was of an actual apron that I



could wear in the kitchen - but how would it be Fatty? I decided to involve other people, make it a collaborative project. With the help of a friend who took on a coordinating role, we sent squares of red and orange fabric to about 20 friends, asking them to create a representation of their favourite fat, in whatever form they liked - drawing, collage, applique, embroidery, writing, etc.

By the time I came home from surgery, the first completed squares had started to arrive - avocado, clotted cream, mackerel! Meanwhile my son's girlfriend and I started work on an "intestinal pocket", which would show which organs I still had left.

Both my sisters got involved and eventually I had 16 Fatty Squares, all different, beautiful and unique. In one of my good weeks during chemotherapy, I stayed with my friend Sue, who's a whizz at patchwork and quilting. With her help, the squares and the pocket were transformed into a wonderful apron that is



much too good to wear for cooking - and I'd never be able to wash it anyway!

At the end of my chemotherapy treatment, the Fatty Apron was the central art piece in a performance to an audience of friends and family that retold the story of my cancer treatment and the reclaiming of my "lost" organs. As a collaborative work of art, the Fatty Apron provoked art-making and discussion, increasing understanding of ovarian cancer and my feeling of agency in dealing with the disease.

The Fatty Apron was such an uplifting project to be part of during some dark and worrying days and it's a daily reminder of the love and support I've had from family and friends. I also hope it might be used in a wider way, as a tribute to the fantastic professionals who've helped me throughout my treatment and to raise awareness or funds for charities like Ovacom and Penny Brohn UK, both charities that have been a fantastic source of support, help and advice about ovarian cancer.



Who I am

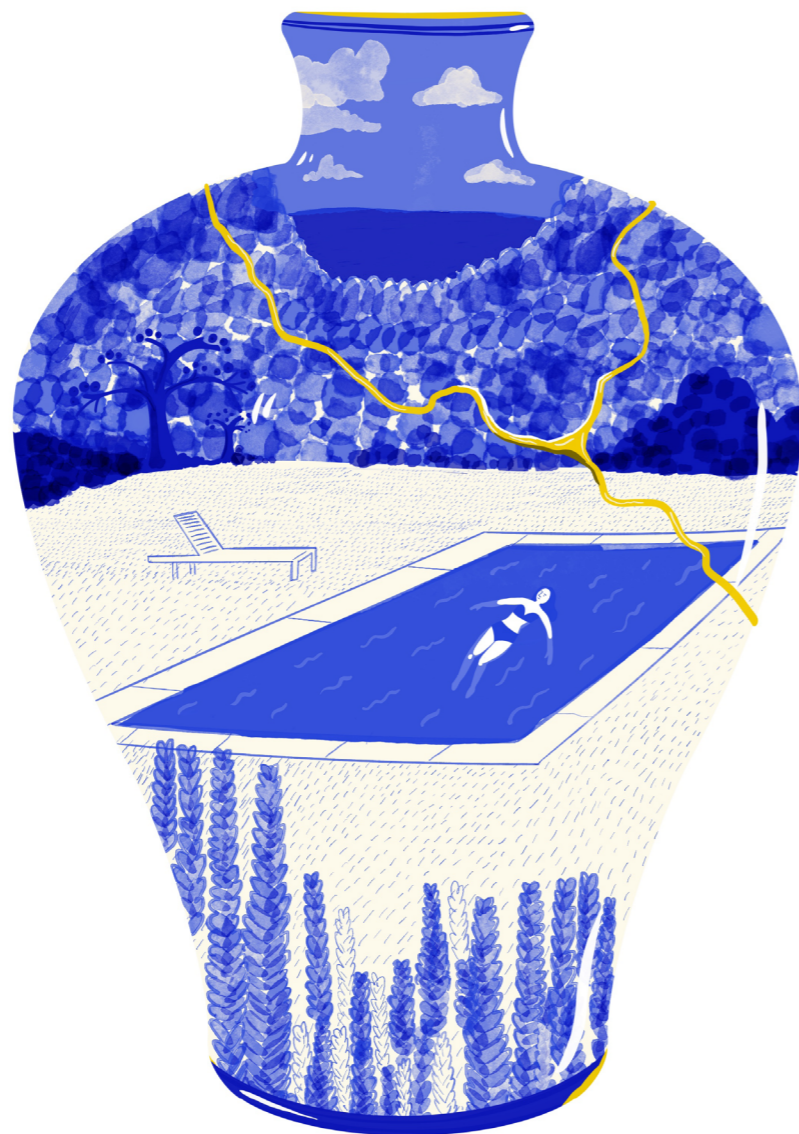
By Sheran Joy

I'm carrying weight, I see and feel it too,
I look in the mirror – hey it's Winnie the Pooh!
No breasts throwing shadow, my tummy sticks out
But my body is not what I'm all about!

I'm laid in the garden, whilst the sun reigns again,
Trying to 'tan blend' my Radiotherapy skin 'stain'.
I'm happy flat but when I take a swim,
I always pop my fake boobies in.

Am I worried about what others see?
No, I just want to be the best me, for me,
I choose my boobs, for the clothes I'm to wear,
As I select a lippy or style my hair.

Some days I'm buxom, some days I'm not,
On hot days I go flat
And don't give a jot!
My body still protects my being, my soul,
That is who I am, and I am whole.



Content warning: This piece contains references to radiotherapy and surgery that some readers may find difficult. If you're in need of support, please see the resources section at the back of the magazine.

Body

By Joy Beak

From the day I was born my body, my life, was given to me as a gift. My body, my protective outer layer.

As a child my body was cared for and nurtured by my parents, until the day came when I was old enough to take on the responsibility myself.

This was a very daunting thought, a huge task; what if I let my body down in some way?!

After a while I became more relaxed about my new responsibility. I got on with enjoying life, I thought my body was infallible, untouchable.

The big C as it was known, only chooses people that smoke, or that's what I was told. I thought I was safe.

As I got older my body grew. I became an adult, a wife, a mother.

But my body began to fail

me. I became very ill.

Yes, the dreaded C. This was a huge shock to me. I had never smoked, I had looked after my body.

I had to undergo surgery, surgery that would disfigure me. My body would be scarred, but I had no choice – this surgery would save my life.

As time passed, I was recovering, I felt stronger and realised I did have my body back. It still worked the same, it just looked a bit different, and no one could see my scars.

Then I became a grandmother to two adorable little boys. They helped my recovery, they gave me a reason to fight.

After intensive surgery and radical radiotherapy, my body not only looked very different, it felt different. It didn't function as it had before.

Eventually, after a lot of

help and support from my family, the NHS and with perseverance, I managed to get my body back to some sort of normality. Off I went trying to piece myself back together again, with the help of my two little saviours by my side.

But sadly, it wasn't long before my body got struck again by the dreadful, dreaded big C. This time I needed chemotherapy.

I must keep fighting to save my body, my protective layer. I feel as though my body is slipping through my fingers. Despite all my efforts, bit by bit, parts are being taken from me. I feel out of control.

I don't look or feel the same as I did, and every scar has a story to tell.

But one thing is for sure. It doesn't matter how much of my body they take from me, no one can take away my strength.



The Big C and the Big O

The power of pleasure in cancer recovery

By Natalie Beech

How does the word 'sex' make you feel? How about the words 'sexual pleasure'? 'Sexual energy'? 'Full body orgasm'? Is it giving you full body cringe? Before you close the magazine – take a breath – and let me assure you that this article isn't what you think.

For some time at Flourish we've been keen to cover sex and cancer. It felt like no one was talking about it, which is exactly why we needed to talk about it. And yet ahead of interviewing Jem Ayres, who describes herself as 'A Sexological Bodyworker, Tantra Practitioner and Orgasmic Embodiment Coach', I was apprehensive, embarrassed

already, as it seems most people who come to her sessions are.

"Everyone is scared that everyone else in the room is going to be a pervert. It's hilarious. Am I going to be the only normal person?"

"Sometimes when I talk a lot about sexual energy, that can seem a bit woo-woo and cosmic, and people don't always

connect. But actually, let's just look at the science for a moment. Pleasure and touch and orgasm. They're good for our nervous system. They're good for our immune system, our stress levels, our mental health, pain relief, and partner connection and self-connection."

Jem came to working with cancer patients after going through her own diagnosis. Having experienced sexual challenges and shut down in relationships as a result of sexual trauma, Jem had been doing tantra and Taoist practices for five years before her cancer diagnosis. At 32, she was told she had tumours in her brain, lungs and lymph nodes, that she would only be offered palliative care, to go home and spend time with her loved ones, and to move into a ground floor flat – for she wouldn't be able to make the stairs much longer.

"I recognised I felt okay in my body until I was told I had cancer, and the word cancer hit me like a wall. It was at that point I started to feel sick and unwell." Jem said. "What I needed to do was to tap into my body's wisdom and really listen to what my body was saying.

Alongside her immunotherapy, Jem used the knowledge she'd accumulated to practice full body orgasm as part of her healing.

"My intention was, if I'm

going to be dying of cancer, I'm going to make sure I spend the rest of my time in as much pleasure as possible."

Less than six months later she was cancer free and remains so eight years on. She began speaking about her practice and sharing her experiences in videos online, leading many to reach out for advice and support.

"That was the point I realised I had something to teach as a sex coach."

She's keen to stress that full body orgasm is not what we usually associate with orgasm. It's less about the end goal – the type of orgasm we're used to seeing in popular culture or pornography – and more about finding pleasure in our bodies as a whole.

"I think this is the important thing, that we release the goal – even the goal of overcoming cancer."

When so much shame can be found in our relationships with our bodies and our sexuality, starting slowly and considering what makes the body feel good in the face of cancer can help make it feel like home again, opening the door to pleasure – a word we rarely see in relation to cancer recovery.

"When I talk to clients, I talk about how they can release their rage or shame or fear and find joy in really healthy ways. So that might be dancing, journaling,

shaking, crying, singing, or rolling around on the floor. Instead of being too structured and formulaic, they can just let the body self-express. And orgasm is a release, it's a letting go."

When she works with people with cancer, she starts by looking at how to reconnect with your body. That might be as simple as stroking your hair, holding yourself, or bringing attention and awareness to how you bathe.

"I like to look at how can we give ourselves touch and pleasure in a way that's resourcing and refuelling. So it's not a job, but something to give ourselves in times of challenges, when we're feeling ill, when we're in pain, when we're in bereavement. How can I touch my body so that it's nourishing?"

If like me, you're curious – but perhaps not ready to sign up to a full body orgasm session just yet – Jem offers a number of free videos and recordings on her website – meditations and exercises to put you in touch with your body, and your pleasure, at home.

"It's really about how do I enjoy my own body exactly as it is? And it might not be perfect today. I might not be my shiniest self, but yet I still experience and I'm absolutely worthy of pleasure in my life. I think that's really valuable."

Find out more about Jem and her work on her website at jemayres.co.uk.



Sculpture and Words by Jenny Etches

I made this little clay model after exploring the role of women and creativity. I wanted to express the glory of the female form with all its imperfections, particularly emphasising the breasts having had breast surgery for cancer.



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Changing Body

By Brenda Greet

Once beautiful, youthful body
 Gradually ages and changes
 More wrinkles, less flexibility
 Less speed, more aches and pains
 This is ageing.

Sudden onslaught, sudden change
 Dismaying diagnosis
 Disarmed, denied
 This is cancer.

Once beautiful pert breasts,
 Naturally sagging, now disfigured
 by scalpel and dye
 This is cancer.

Once pretty face, unblemished, unlined
 Naturally alters, naturally matures
 Now scarred, identity altered
 This is cancer.

Radiotherapy, bombards the body
 Medications bombard the soul
 Necessary 'evils' to cure and repair
 This is treatment.

Anti-climax, relief, all has been done,
 Life to live again,
 Time to heal, recover, move on
 Don't look back,
 Face today, one step at a time
 This is hope.



Artwork and Words by Michelle Grover

I found the artwork was a way to process my mastectomy and implant. These three acrylic paint/collage pieces reflect my feeling of being fragmented and repaired.





A-Z of me

Image and Words by Allyson Kent

Words have the power to inspire and lift us, or to cause real harm, impacting our physical and mental health. These can be words we hear from others, or those we hear from ourselves. The words adjust and rest have helped me and have become my new guiding words, as I learn not to be so hard on myself.

Words surround me in my craft room, words that lift me on my 'not so good days' or when I'm having a wobble. A wobble for me is when I'm feeling emotional, when the tears just come, sometimes

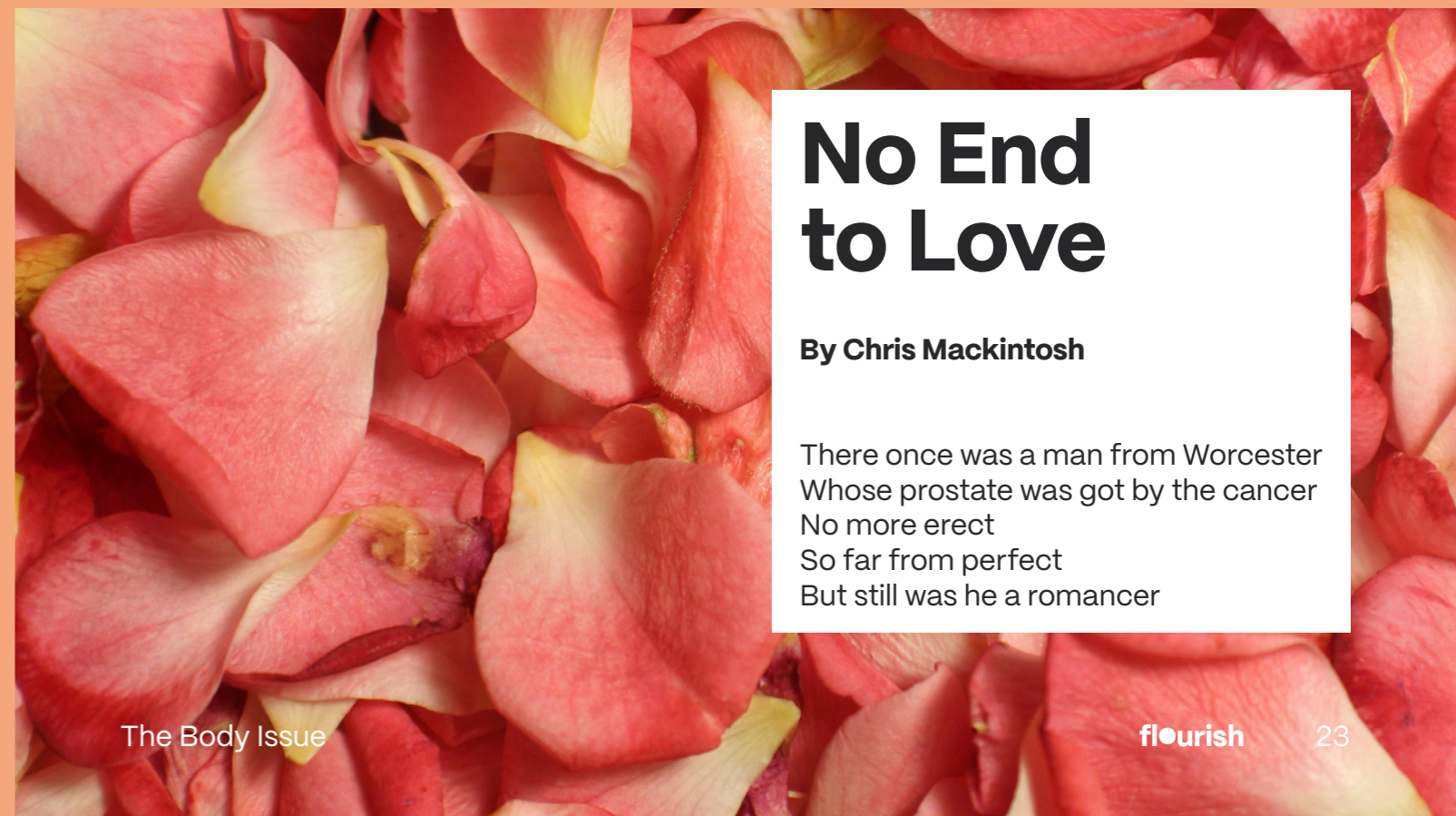
for no apparent reason, but like a Weeble (only people of a certain age will understand this, 'Weeble's wobble but they don't fall down'), I am now understanding my body and what helps me to get up and take that next step forward.

It was one Sunday morning, thinking about the things that helped me during a wobble, that I realised the very same things that were helping me to live a fulfilled life after the diagnosis were helping me now: words.

Words that remind me to think differently and look at the things I can do. The idea of an A to Z was born.

Writing down the words of the A to Z with many more, I see the power of words to develop art. This is my first attempt which in sewing terms is known as a toile, a practice run, from which to learn. It has inspired me.

- Acknowledge feelings**
- Breathe**
- Connect with others**
- Diet**
- Exercise**
- Find your tribe**
- Practice Gratitude**
- Add Happy Hormones to your day**
- Manage the Inner chatter box**
- Journal - let it all out**
- Know the power of words KPOW**
- Laugh**
- Meditation**
- Say No to things or people that no longer bring you joy**
- One day at a time**
- Parkrun - They actively encourage people to walk**
- Questions - ask them**
- Rest**
- Stress management**
- Talk**
- Understand yourself**
- Vitamin D - with sunblock**
- Water**
- X - love yourself**
- Yes I Can - affirmation**
- Zzzzzz - Sleep**



No End to Love

By Chris Mackintosh

There once was a man from Worcester
Whose prostate was got by the cancer
No more erect
So far from perfect
But still was he a romancer

My Cage

By Pam Peters

My body is broken
But I still crave freedom

My body is lonely
But I still crave isolation

My body is mindless
I still crave conversation

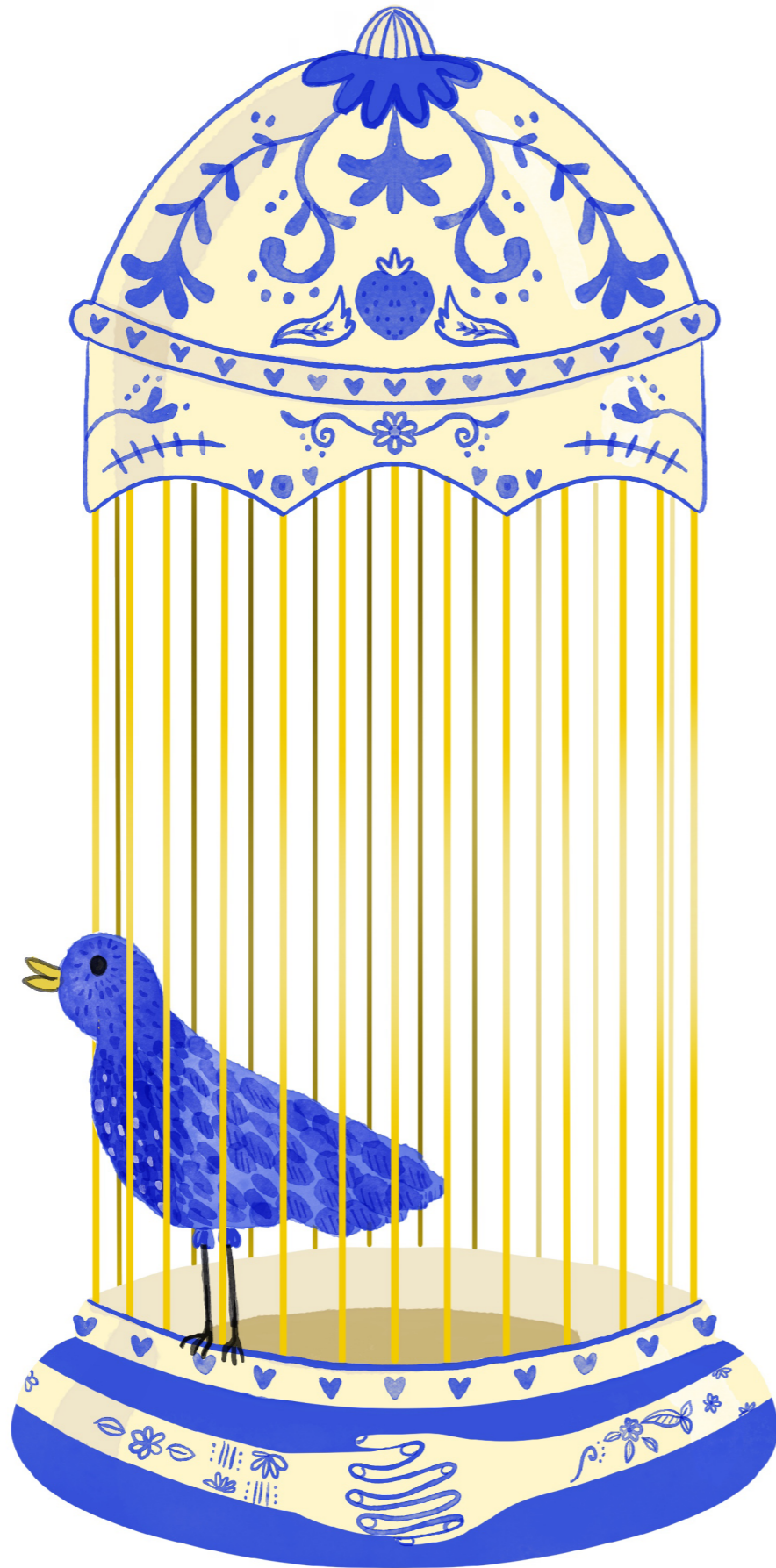
My body is soulless
I still crave faith

My body is sexless
But I still crave my lover

My body is tasteless
But I still crave great food

My heart is broken
I still crave love

Till my body is mended
Please help me get through
To get me back to
What I crave to do.



Celebrate the Body of Life

By Josephine Smith

It's time to celebrate,
Celebrate our love,
The love of friends and family,
The beauty of a dove.

It's time to celebrate,
Celebrate our lives,
Look at all the positives,
The bees around their hives.

It's time to celebrate,
Celebrate our health,
The spirit in our community,
The wildlife in its wealth.

It's time to celebrate,
Celebrate our fun,
The fact we are warm and dry,
And the warmth of the midday sun.

Transforming Waters: Embracing Body Awareness and Strength

By Raphaela Reeb

During my three decades as a senior flight attendant, my life was meticulously calibrated. Every fluctuation in weight was scrutinised, and the fit of my uniform spoke volumes about my dedication to the job. It was a career that I cherished, one that allowed me to explore the world and connect with people from all walks of life. Yet, like the sudden onset of turbulence, the COVID-19 pandemic brought my dream career to an abrupt halt.

Amidst the chaos and uncertainty that followed, I found solace in returning to my roots in graphic design and illustration. It was a return to a passion that had always been simmering beneath the surface, waiting for the right moment to emerge. Little did I know, however, that another storm was brewing — a battle with Stage 3 Bowel Cancer.

The moment my consultant mentioned the possibility of a “stoma” as part of my post-surgery reality, it felt like being plunged into darkness. The concept was utterly foreign to me until that point, and the thought of it was both terrifying and overwhelming. Yet, with little time to process, I found myself faced with a life-altering decision. In the end, I chose the unknown path of an ostomy, rejecting the alternative of a lifetime bound to a toilet.

Six days later, I found myself undergoing surgery, confronting the stark truth of my new reality. The sight of my stoma nurse marking the site for surgery served as a poignant reminder of the irreversible change that lay ahead. Amidst the whirlwind of emotions that accompanied those days, I took a final photo of my stomach—a symbolic farewell to the body I once knew.

The days that followed were a blur of recovery, compounded by unexpected Christmas hospitalisation due to minor complications.

Yet, amidst the isolation of the pandemic, I found moments of solace in the digital connections with loved ones. The hospital’s gesture of Christmas presents served as a poignant reminder of the gift of life—a gift that was reaffirmed by the news that the cancer had been eradicated, downgraded to Stage 2.

In the aftermath of surgery, I embarked on a journey of self-acceptance and gratitude. Through launching my radio show and podcast *Stoma4Life*, I channel my experience into advocacy, determined to shine a light on the silent threat of Bowel Cancer, and life as an Ostomate. My journey underscores the power of intuition and self-awareness in navigating life’s storms, urging others to heed the whispers of their bodies.

Although classified as having a disability as an ostomate, I feel far from it. Instead, I see my ostomy as a symbol of resilience and a reminder of the strength that lies within me. It is not a limitation but rather a new way of experiencing life—one that has opened doors to new opportunities and perspectives.

In addition to my advocacy work, I am in the process of becoming an art life coach, helping people deal with life after cancer through art—a new avenue that I would never have taken without being diagnosed. It’s a journey of exploration and

healing, one that allows me to use my passion for art to support others on their own paths to recovery.

Bowel Cancer is often concealed until its late stages, thriving in silence and invisibility. By fostering dialogue and promoting awareness, I empower individuals to take control of their health journey. Together, let us break the silence, dismantle stigma, and celebrate the resilience of the human spirit.

As I embrace life with a newfound perspective, I am reminded of the beauty of resilience and the transformative power of gratitude. Swimming every day in South Africa this March, bag and all, I embraced my new self, loving my body again. The illustration serves as a poignant reminder: when thrown into the deep end, it’s up to you to swim or sink.

Each step forward is a testament to the strength that resides within us, waiting to be discovered amidst adversity. Through courage, resilience, and unwavering determination, we navigate life’s turbulent waters, emerging stronger and more resilient than before. Embracing our bodies anew, even after enduring so much, further reflects our enduring power.

You can listen to Raphaela’s show *Stoma4Life*, on UK Health Radio and on all major podcasting platforms under the UK Health Radio umbrella.

What is a Body?

By Denise Bates

What is a Body – the bones, the flesh, the organs, the blood, the cells.

Who sees the body – the scanner sees everything inside.

MDT see a report, a picture, an opinion but never the person.

The Oncologist sees the lit up invasion and the overall complex complexion.

The friend sees the smile, the tears and the fear.

The stranger sees the beanie and offers unsolicited pity and sympathy.

The partner no longer sees the wife.

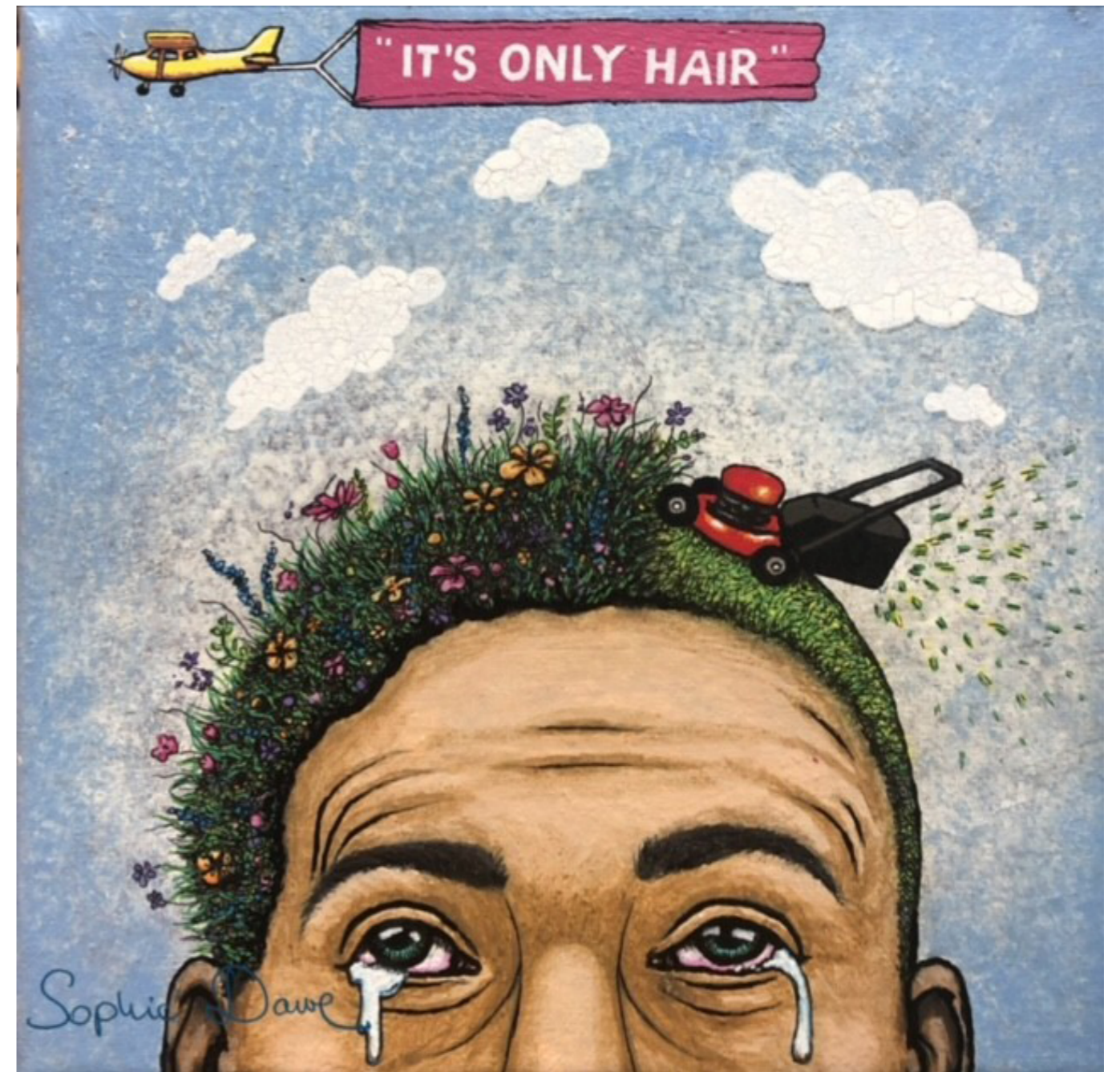
I see the scars beneath, the change, the toll of ten years of existing with the bones that ache, the blood that's tested, the cells that mutate, migrate and evade

And somewhere in the body there still exists a pocket of hope and sunny days,

a desire to last to old age, a mind that tells the body it is good, it is well

and the body keeps on keeping on

until it doesn't.



It's Only Hair

Artwork and Words by Sophie Dawe

I have had Hodgkin's Lymphoma twice within the last four years, and it was a year in June since I received a stem cell transplant in Cheltenham Hospital. Within days of being discharged

from the hospital, I have started creating and painting (with acrylics on canvas) as my own healing art therapy. I have created more than 30 paintings within a few months. This was my main

focus during my recovery.

See more of Sophie's work on Facebook by searching 'Thoughts around Cancer Art Project'.

Call-out for submissions for Issue 6 on the theme of 'Mind'

Do you like making art, crafting, taking photographs, writing poetry, stories or blogs? Interested in getting creative? We're looking for those with lived experience of cancer to submit to our magazine!

Eligibility

We are looking for artwork, photography, creative or personal writing, craft, pottery, or anything creative for Issue 6 of Flourish Magazine, a free print and digital magazine by and for the cancer community, around the theme of the 'Mind'.

We are looking for contributions from those:

- living with or beyond cancer.
- living in relation to it, i.e. a friend or family member of someone who has experienced cancer.
- working with people with cancer, such as carers or healthcare professionals.

You do not need to have any experience of art or done anything creative before.

We are particularly interested in submissions from Global Majority communities, d/Deaf and disabled communities, the LGBTQ+ community, as well as those living in or around Bristol, South Gloucestershire or Gloucestershire – so please feel free to identify this in our submission if you're comfortable to do so.

All contributions must be sent to flourish.mag@artlift.org by 10pm, Friday 31st January 2025.

Theme: 'Mind'

After our issue on the Body, for Issue 6 we turn to the Mind. As always the theme is open to any and all interpretations and nothing is off limits! But here's some questions to inspire you:

- How do you manage your mind?
- Is it loud? Quiet? A friend or foe?
- Mindfulness or mindlessness?
- What about hive minds?
- What do you and don't you mind about cancer?

Submission criteria

- Writing submissions should not be more than 700 words.
- Submissions of artwork or photography should be high-resolution.
- Photographs of craft, pottery, etc. should be high-resolution.
- Please ensure you own the copyright to any work submitted.

We look at everything that is sent to us, but cannot guarantee your work will be selected for the magazine. If you have questions about our selection process, please get in touch on flourish.mag@artlift.org.

If you are a health or care professional, nutritionist or therapist and would like to be featured or interviewed for the magazine, please contact Editor Natalie Beech on flourish.mag@artlift.org.

We'll let you know if your work has been selected for the magazine by **Friday 14th February 2025**.

Important: This is a volunteer and unpaid opportunity. If your work is included in the magazine, we'll send you a copy of the issue and you will be credited.

Resources

Below is a list of additional resources and organisations to those featured in the magazine, which we've compiled to help support you through cancer, from national organisations to Gloucestershire and Bristol based ones for those living in the area.

Black Women Rising blackwomenrisinguk.org

Black Women Rising is a project set up by Leanne Pero to support black women going through cancer. They offer monthly support groups, a podcast, magazine, and more.

CAAFI Health caafihealth.com

Caafi Health is a grassroots organisation that works to improve the health and wellbeing of the diverse populations in Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.

Cancer Care Map cancercaormap.org

Online resource that aims to help you find cancer support services in your local area.

Charlie's charlies.org.uk

Community cancer support and therapy centre based in Gloucestershire.

Gloucestershire Cancer Exercise gloscancerexercise.org.uk

Exercise sessions for those living with and beyond cancer in Gloucestershire.

LGBTQ+ Experiences of Cancer lgbcancer.wordpress.com

livethroughthis.co.uk

Personal stories and helpful resources about living with or beyond cancer.

Look Good Feel Good lookgoodfeelbetter.co.uk

Look Good Feel Better run free workshops in the UK, led by expert volunteers from the beauty and wellbeing industry, which give practical advice and support to people living with cancer.

Macmillan Cancer Support: In Your Area macmillan.org.uk/in-your-area/choose-location.html

An online directory aiming to help you find practical help, self-help and support groups and centres in your area.

Macmillan Helpline macmillan.org.uk

For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00.

Macmillan Next Steps Gloucestershire ghc.nhs.uk/our-teams-and-services/macmillan

An NHS rehabilitation service providing services and courses that support those living in Gloucestershire diagnosed with cancer.

Maggie's maggies.org

Charity that provides free cancer support and information in centres across the UK and online.

National Centre for Integrative Medicine ncim.org.uk

Champions a transformation in healthcare – one that takes a whole-person approach, puts patients back in charge of their health, and helps them to feel more informed about their care.

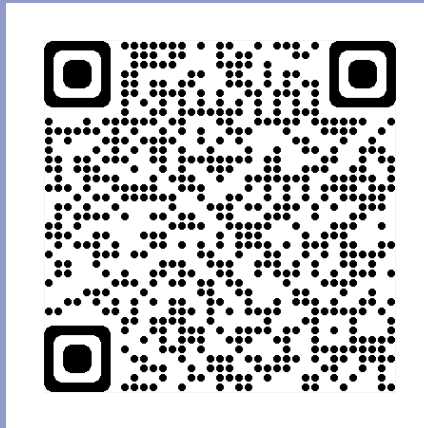
Penny Brohn UK pennybrohn.org.uk

UK Charity providing free, integrative care to those living with cancer.

Wigwam and Yes to Life yestolife.org.uk/cancer-support-groups

Yes to Life's online and Gloucestershire-based cancer support groups, plus links to conventional, lifestyle and complimentary resources.

We would love to hear your thoughts on this issue of Flourish Magazine! Scan this QR code to take our quick survey and let us know your feedback.



flourish



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