

A young woman is dealing with a cancer battle for the second time, aged only 24

Sharon’s cancer whirlwind tour wowing the world

• After the all clear from breast cancer Sharon was diagnosed with multiple tumours



“I’m a firm believer that there’s a reason behind everything. You never know what tomorrow brings.” That’s the chirpy outlook on life of 24-year-old Sharon Carroll, who is certainly entitled to question the cards she’s been dealt so far. Being diagnosed with breast cancer shortly after her 21st birthday and undergoing a double mastectomy was tough enough. Getting the all clear at the end of the treatment and just three years

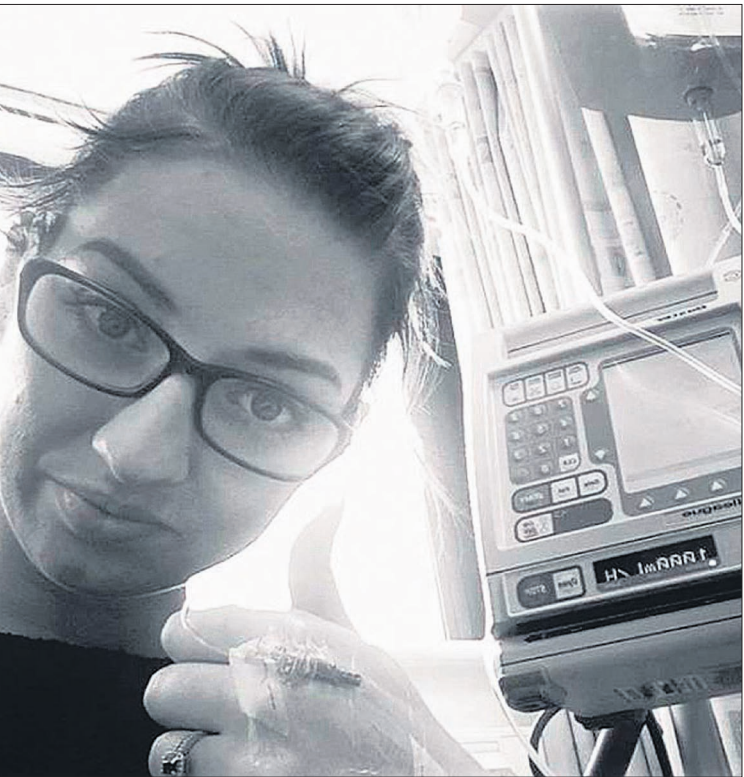


later ending up being told “It’s not good, the cancer’s back” is unimaginable for most. However, Sharon from Lisheen, Williamstown who will tomorrow undergo her second last of 18 rounds of chemotherapy since October, says cancer is now part of her life and she is just “getting on with it”. Coping with a cancer diagnosis for Sharon has been easier the second time round. “The first time was ten times harder. The second time I knew what it was like.” Her breast cancer diagnosis resulted in eight rounds of chemo, a double mastectomy and the removal of lymph nodes, and radium treatment - this time there’s a bigger battle to fight. Glistening-eyed Sharon rhymes off her current diagnosis without hesitation as if she was listing out her top foods. Just days before she was to fly to Australia for a return trip, Sharon was told the cancer was back, the following week after scan and test results were all back she was told just how big a bang it came back with. “So, they found trace tumours back again in my breast, there are small tumours in each of my lungs, it’s in my chest bone, there are tumours in my lower back and lower skull. I kind of light up like a Christmas tree,” she laughs. Laughing has helped Sharon and her close friends cope with the enormity of her condition. “We looked at each other and laughed. If we didn’t laugh we would’ve cried, so we laughed and laughed,” is how Sharon describes her reaction and that of one of her best friends to being told about the tumours in September. Sharon sees her trip to UHG for chemo every week like other people heading out to do their weekly shop. “I can’t change it, they’re the cards that have been dealt to me so I just have to get on with it. It’s part of my life, it’s normal for me.” Her upbeat and positive attitude is not just impressive, it’s quite infectious. Obviously she thought she wouldn’t be busy enough battling cancer, so Sharon decided to enrol in a business course in September – to “give me something to keep me busy” she quips. Part of this involved setting up a website and after some slight hesitation Sharon made her blog about her cancer journey ‘live’. The response was immediate and

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incredible. Sharon’s Cancer Whirlwind, which is also the name of her Facebook page, became shared across the world and she has been contacted by young people who are experiencing similar situations as well as family and relatives of people with cancer. “I decided to do the website on my cancer as I thought it wouldn’t be any harm if it helped create awareness among young people that this could happen to anyone, no matter what their age.” The blog went live in early January and response has been “crazy” according to Sharon who is still trying to respond to all the emails and messages she receives. “People ask me how can I be so understanding of it but this is part of my life now and I just have

to deal with it. “I’m delighted that the blog seems to be helping so many people and also making more people aware.” The medical experts couldn’t find any explanation for Sharon’s breast cancer at such an early age. No one in her family has had breast cancer. She has undergone the gene tests and they have also come back negative. “I was diagnosed on a Friday and the following week I went on holiday. It was an amazing holiday and it only started to hit me just before I was due to come home that I had breast cancer. “It does annoy me that people seem to think the doctors missed something the first time. I had all the scans, tests and check-ups after my treatment and was back to good health and had the



ABOVE: Sharon at a chemo session earlier this year. LEFT: Ever-smiling Sharon hopes her blog will help others in similar situations.

carried out on a Friday and as she was due to fly to Australia the following Wednesday the results were back by Monday. “When I got the call asking me to come to the hospital I knew something was up. My friend told me I was over-analysing but I got a feeling something wasn’t right. I knew by the doctor’s face that something was wrong. ‘I’m so sorry to tell you, but the cancer is back’ and I could see how gutted he was to have to tell me that.” A week later Sharon was told the scale of the spread of the cancer and she knows that the 18 rounds of chemo this time aren’t to put a stop to it but more to “get it under control”. Sharon started her 18 chemo sessions in October and is due to have her final one the day after St Patrick’s Day, March 18. “When I was told I’d have to have 18 rounds, I nearly fell off the chair. I was only after getting my hair back to normal,” she says. Sharon trained as a hairdresser and it’s something she always wanted to do, having started working in a local salon aged 14. She had a great time travelling and working in the hair salons in Australia but she is equally enjoying the business course and it’s an area she’s keen to become more involved in. “I hadn’t passed any heed of the rash but asked my GP for something to clear it up.” After a week of antibiotics and a steroid cream there hadn’t been any improvement in the rash and she went back looking for something stronger to get rid of it. Dr Martin Daly in Ballygar referred her back to her consultant in UHG but she recalls that at that stage neither he nor she were worried about it. A precautionary biopsy was me handling it so well it’s easier for them. We’re still as crazy a family as ever.” Sharon blogs and updates her Facebook page when she feels she has something to write about and not just “for the sake of it”. “Thank God for make-up! Of course I don’t post photos of when I’m sick or hanging over the toilet. There are plenty of days when I wake up in so much pain but you just have to get on with it. You can’t go around wallowing in an oncology ward, there’s plenty more worse off than you.” Sharon recently appeared on TV3’s Ireland AM and got a huge reaction to her positive attitude. “There are a lot of people a lot sicker than me. I wouldn’t wish it on any family,” says Sharon, whose main aim by being so public about her illness is to show other young people how easily something like this could happen to them. She has given talks to students at Glenamaddy Community School where she impresses on young people the importance of not getting stressed and worried about silly things. “CAO points and people’s opinions aren’t the end of the world. There’s always a way around everything. I tell them I’d love to be in their situation.” In a few weeks’ time Sharon will get an idea as to how effective the harsh chemotherapy treatments have been. “We’ll see how it goes. I don’t get my hopes up. We’re still in limbo. I’ve every faith in the doctors but they will tell you straight. The biggest thing is to get it under control. “I’m never going to be cancer-free.” Do you know someone who should feature on this page - let us know - tuamherald.ie