

Survivor Story: Brent Nogle

Vista, CA Local 4107 / Fire Fighter & Paramedic
Diagnosed with colon cancer in 2020

My name is Brent Nogle. I have been a fire fighter/paramedic for the city of Vista in California for 11 years.

In late 2020, after several months of changing my diet by excluding foods and adding supplements, I eventually ran out of excuses of why I had a significant change in bowel habits.

Time to go see my primary care doctor. My doctor did some simple blood work and referred me to a GI specialist. During my initial consultation, the GI doctor explained that based on my symptoms and the fact that none of the changes to my diet or supplements worked, a colonoscopy was the next step. I agreed and it was set.

It didn't take long during the exam to find the large tumor, which was almost a complete obstruction now. The tumor was biopsied and sent to the lab. I was briefed after the exam of the findings and was told to stand by. The doctor would call me with the results.

Two days later, we got the phone call that would change our lives. Colon cancer.

Things really started to move quickly after that. I met the surgeon two days later, and — within 10 days of my diagnosis — I was on the operating table.

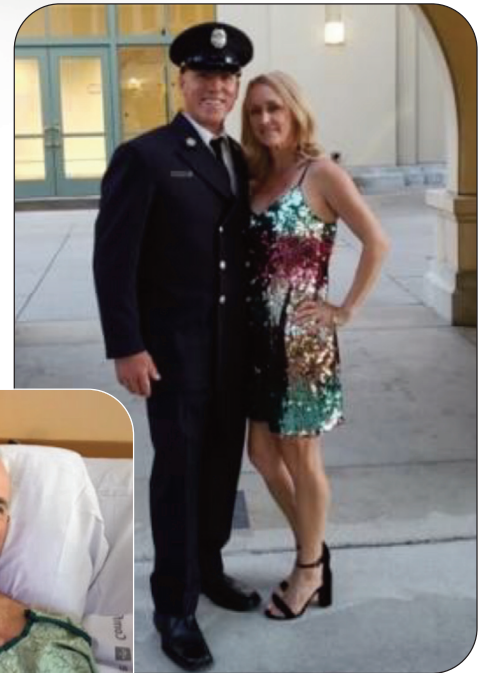
During all the chaos of receiving a scary diagnosis like cancer and the whirlwind of informing family and friends of this news, I had more questions than answers and the internet search of cancer is a very scary black hole to venture down alone.

Once all of my family had been notified, I made two other phone calls. The first phone call was to my union president because I knew based on experience dealing with workers' comp that I was in for a fight, and I was going to rely on my union brothers and sisters to help me fight.

The second phone call I made was to my fire chief. My fire chief has always been supportive, and I knew I was going to need his help and support.

During this time, my fire department was just starting to implement cancer prevention policies and procedures and most of the changes were coming from the fire chief. After letting the chief know of my diagnosis, he said two things: 1) "Let me know what you and your family need and how we can help." 2) "Contact the Firefighter Cancer Support Network."

I went online and filled out the information. I was immediately contacted by Scott Jennie, FCSN California State Director (on Christmas Eve) who was so informative on what steps need to be taken immediately. He also notified me that my toolbox was being sent out and I should be getting it soon.



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The other amazing resource that was given to me was my mentor. Having someone who has been through the same thing to talk to was the most valuable tool that I didn't know I needed.

My mentor Rick was always just a text or phone call away, and we spent many evenings after my surgery talking about what to expect over the next few weeks and months as I recovered from surgery and began treatment with chemotherapy. Rick and I talked about diet, and all of the embarrassing things that come along after having a sizeable amount of my large intestine removed, and trying to find out what my new normal was. I was able to return to work after nine months, and I had thought I had put this whole cancer thing to bed.

A couple of weeks before my one-year anniversary, I began to have some of the same symptoms I had initially reported to the doctor. I had a one-year colonoscopy scheduled already as part of the follow-up protocol, and the exam again found some tissue that looked suspicious and needed biopsy. Again, I was told I have cancer.

With a recurrent diagnosis, things really got ramped up and scary. I reached out to Scott Jennie, my mentor Rick, and the whole Firefighter Cancer Support Network. I dug out my old toolbox, and I began to come up with another treatment plan to wage another war against this stupid disease.

As I write this "survivor story," I am lying on the couch recovering from another surgery. The surgery was a success, and I have hopes of returning to work again in a few months once I have healed completely.

To date, I have been through a total of six chemotherapy infusions through a port-a-catheter over the course of three months, 25 radiation treatments over five weeks, six months of pill-form chemotherapy, and two anterior resection surgeries.

This has been quite a battle, and I am still fighting. I don't know now what the future holds for me and my family, but what I do know is my wife, Diane, my two kids, and the rest of my family, my union brothers and sisters, my closest friends, my fire department, and the Firefighter Cancer Support Network all have my back. Knowing that, I wake up and take on the challenges I face now with confidence. Thank you.

