



Fire Fighter Cancer Awareness and Prevention



SURVIVOR STORY: DONNA LUCE-MACDONALD

**Providence, RI Local 799 / Firefighter & EMT
Diagnosed with chondrosarcoma (bone cancer) of the sternum in 2005**

“Retirement was not part of my plan. I was only 15 years in, and I wanted at least 30.”

I was diagnosed with bone cancer in 2005. I worked on a very busy engine company and was training for the Firefighter Combat Challenge at the time. I used both reasons as an excuse as to why I was extremely fatigued and losing weight. Cancer never crossed my mind, and why would it? I was young, happy, healthy, fit and I ate clean healthy foods. I never thought I would be diagnosed with cancer. I think almost every person diagnosed with cancer asks that same question and walks around in a fog in which the doctors lead you. My cancer was rare and for it to be in my sternum was also very rare.

I always put all I've got into everything I do, and cancer was no exception, my body was determined to challenge the doctors and my diagnosis. My sternum had to be removed and doctors had to build a prosthetic in the operating room. My prosthetic sternum was made of Gortex and my body decided to reject it slowly over a year's time. This led to surgery number two, removal of the prosthetic, but they were unable to replace it because of infection.

After seven years of active duty with no sternum in my chest, it needed to be completely reconstructed. A new prosthetic made of different material and bolted in by titanium was inserted to my body. My pectoral muscles had to be cut and reattached for each surgery, so much so that they had a difficult time recovering.

This led to a fourth surgery and ultimately forced me into retirement. Retirement was not part of my plan. I was only 15 years in, and I wanted at least 30. I wanted to move through the ranks, but we can't always get what we want and that was the hardest pill to swallow. The emotional toll was a surprise punch to the gut. As hard as you try to be positive and strong, the depression, the anxiety of reoccurrence and just the years of surgeries, recovery, tests, scans and hospital gowns with no backs will wear you down. It's cold in an MRI machine and the chill alone gets to you.

I wasn't aware of FCSN when I was originally diagnosed because the organization was just being founded, but I have been heavily involved since I could be. I have leaned on the amazing mentors that are a part of FCSN over the years. Even though it's been 15 years, my story continues with other surgeries and illness that were caused by cancer, and FCSN is there to support me through it all!

