Runner Thanks NHS Teams Who Saved His Life

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A MARATHON runner says he was lucky to end up in hospital when he did, after his tonsillitis infection spread to his heart and caused it to start shutting down.

Alan Day was an avid runner, 30 years old, and outwardly seemed fit and healthy when he developed the throat infection. This rapidly led to heart failure and left Alan needing life-saving treatment to help his heart pump blood around his body. He only ended up in hospital by chance, after he lost consciousness and hit his head. He says he feels lucky he was admitted when he was, otherwise his heart failure may have gone unnoticed until it was too late.

Now Alan is thanking the medical teams at both Manchester Royal Infirmary and Wythenshawe Hospital whose quick thinking saved his life, by fundraising for the hospitals' charity Manchester Foundation Trust Charity.

He has decided to share his story for the first time and fundraise for Manchester Foundation Trust Charity as part of the organisation's new Be A Good Sport campaign which encourages supporters to sign up to sporting challenges to raise funds for their favourite Manchester hospitals.

Alan, who is running the Virtual London Marathon for the Charity, said: "I can't thank the hospital staff enough for everything they did. I thought I was just getting checked out for a cut on the head, but I'm so grateful they took the time to look over me properly. When they checked me over they realised there was something seriously wrong with my heart.

"I feel very lucky that things happened the way they did. I could have had a very different outcome, but it's too strange to think about that."

Alan, who lives in Stretford, Manchester with his girlfriend Esther Jimenez, had been out on a run in May 2017 when he started to feel a bit under the weather. As it was a hot day, he put it down to a bit of dehydration and not coping with the heat very well. When he still felt unwell at work, he again put it down to feeling run down.

Alan, who works as a civil engineer, said: "I barely slept that night, feeling worse in the morning, so I had the next day off sick. My throat was hurting a lot and after going the whole day with no improvement or rest we went to the walk-in clinic at Manchester Royal Infirmary and they diagnosed tonsilitis. They gave me a prescription for antibiotics and the next morning I went for a walk to pick them up, hoping it might clear up overnight.

"Then in the early afternoon I got up to go to the bathroom, lost consciousness and hit my head on the way down. When I came round my first thought was that I'd gone to sleep on the hallway floor, even though that didn't make any sense. My girlfriend was bent over me on the phone to the ambulance service and I realised something wasn't right. I was bleeding from my head so they wanted to take me into hospital to get me checked out.

"At Manchester Royal Infirmary I was really out of it, but still just thought I was feverish from the tonsilitis infection and lack of sleep for two days. They told me the good news was the cut on my head was very small, but the bad news was there was something wrong with my heart and I wouldn't be leaving hospital for a while.

"They told me I was lucky to hit my head and come to hospital when I did, otherwise it might not have been spotted until it was too late. At my age and in decent health it's something I would never even suspect, but they'd given me an all-over check just to be sure.

"At the time I was fairly dazed and out of it, but it started to sink in that the infection was doing a lot more to my body than I'd first thought."

Tests and scans revealed a viral infection had reached Alan's heart, greatly reducing its ability to pump blood around his body. Doctors explained it was working significantly under its normal capacity and he'd need a pump inserted into his chest to give his heart some support as it was beginning to fail. The reduced pumping capacity meant that the body was trying to lose fluid from the vessels anywhere it could, such as into the lungs, causing them to fill and drastically reduce in capacity. Because of this, blood oxygen levels were severely reduced.

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"I was on lots of medicine to boost the heart's pumping ability and to get rid of the excess fluid," explained Alan. "They inserted the pump to help my heart. It went into the top of my leg and they manoeuvred it up inside me through the artery so it was next to my heart. Once it's in you're not supposed to move or sit up in bed, so for the next week I was laid down with very limited movement.

"I remember being in shock. Lots of doctors were telling me things – I'd try to understand as much as I could but in my state all I could do was to just sort of go along with it. I had full confidence in their expertise and the nurses were excellent in 'translating' the more complex terms."

After a night in Manchester Royal Infirmary, Alan was moved to the Critical Care Unit in Wythenshawe Hospital where he remained with the pump until his heart had started to recover. After about a week he was able to move from the Critical Care Unit to the Acute Ward.

"A few days after that it was safe to take out the pump as the pumping capacity of my heart had increased enough that it could do things on its own again," said Alan. "I was still on a lot of noradrenalin and other medicines and had so many tubes coming out of me. I remember it being a slow process of recovery and one by one the tubes and wires around me were slowly taken away. That was how I measured getting better."

In total Alan was in hospital for two-and-a-half weeks, however he remained as an outpatient to attend regular check-ups and follow-up appointments. Eventually he was signed off from the hospital's care in September 2020.

Since then, Alan has been determined to get back his running stamina which is why he wanted to be part of Be A Good Sport and raise money for Manchester Foundation Trust Charity. He built up his running again doing park runs and regular running around the local area. His Virtual London Marathon will still take place on the same date as the London Marathon – Sunday 3rd October – but his route will take him from Manchester to near his parents' house near Halifax, West Yorkshire.

Alan said: "I've actually picked a pretty hilly route, but I'll just keep in mind my mum's homecooked food at the end of it. I'll also have a few friends running alongside me for different legs of the route so that will help keep me motivated.

"If it was flat I'd be aiming for 4hrs. But as it's so hilly I'd be happy to complete it under 5hrs. Just as long as I finish I'll be happy though."

Viv Williamson, the Senior Events Manager for Manchester Foundation Trust, said Alan's marathon will be a great way to mark one year of being signed off from hospital care. She added: "Alan will have such a great feeling of achievement when he crosses that finish-line. A total of 26.2 miles is no easy feat, especially as he is doing this virtually without the crowd support. We are in awe of his challenge.

"Our Be A Good Sport campaign is all about getting active and doing something amazing for your favourite Greater Manchester hospitals to support our work improving patient experiences and funding treatment, research and care projects. But you don't have to commit to a marathon to get involved! We have plenty of activities to match all abilities and free Charity places in iconic events such as the Virgin London Marathon, the Great North Run and Great Manchester Run.

"You can find out more on our website www.mftcharity.org.uk or search 'MFT Charity' on social media. Come and join in the fun and Be A Good Sport!"

To sponsor Alan visit https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/AlanDay8
or to sign up to Manchester Foundation Trust Charity events and find out more about the Charity visit www.mftcharity.org.uk

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