



SUPPORTING EACH OTHER Kate and Steven Farnell have had their health worries, but have remained strong as a couple through the difficult years

Shouting about rare cancer

When Kate Farnell was diagnosed with thyroid cancer, she hadn't even heard of it, let alone knew how to fight it. That's why she's dedicated the past decade to educating fellow patients and been nominated for a national inspirational women's award in the process. FRANCESCA CRAGGS spoke to her

swelling on the left side of her thyroid and referred for an ultrasound.

The 54-year-old mum-of-one said: "The radiographer was taking ages so I thought, there's a rabbit off here. He told me I had a tumour on my thyroid gland, but said not to worry as they were mostly benign."

"I was sent to a thyroid specialist surgeon who said there was a considerable mass, but 90% of these

cases turn out to be nothing.

"He said we wouldn't know until we took it out, but warned me I was in the right age group for something called thyroid cancer. I was a nurse many years ago, and my husband is a dentist, so we're quite up on medical things. But I'd never ever heard of thyroid cancer."

A fine needle biopsy revealed nothing, so Kate was forced to have half her thyroid removed. If the

results showed cancer, she would have to have the operation repeated on the other side. This unfortunately proved to be the case.

"Within two days I'd lost my voice. I'd been warned that occasionally the surgery can affect the laryngeal nerve. By day two my voice was so soft, I couldn't speak on the phone. I went back for the results and the doctor told us that I had cancer, and there was damage to the nerve and it

might not recover. Everything just went into free fall, like slow motion. I just thought this can't be happening."

Despite being told by the surgeon that 90% of people diagnosed are cured of the disease, Kate was anxious for more information and started to trawl the internet.

"The surgeon said that he'd never lost a patient in my age group.

"Obviously that made me feel a lot better, but the temptation to find out more was overwhelming. There was no information out there about it and no written literature given."

"It's not like a breast cancer lady who gets the diagnosis and is given a specialist nurse with a telephone number. There was none of that."

Treatment followed to

WHILE blow drying her hair one day, Kate Farnell noticed something unusual in the mirror.

One side of her neck appeared "fatter" than the other. She had a gut feeling something wasn't quite right.

Kate, from Rowlands Gill in Gateshead, said: "It all started in 2000. One side of my neck just didn't look right. It was as simple as that. I wasn't worried, I wasn't scared. It's not like if I'd found a breast lump. I would have been at the doctors immediately. But I still knew it wasn't quite right."

Kate's husband Steven, a dentist, happened to be working at Sunderland General Hospital at the time and asked a colleague to take a look. She was told there was a