

This week marked the anniversary of the death of a friend and neighbour from cancer. He was a real character in our little village, a passionate follower of Aylesford Rugby and a supporter of the local economy. He was simply one of life's nice guys. And then out of nowhere came a diagnosis of a fairly rare form of cancer which despite a valiant fight finally took his life and broke the hearts of his wife, family and friends. Sadly, this is an all too familiar story and every week in the KM we read similar tales about this wretched and evil disease and the trail of devastation it leaves. It doesn't discriminate between gender, age or profession and for far too many chances of survival are hampered by the lack of early diagnosis.

In a strange twist of diary coincidence I met with Cancer Research UK this week to discuss local cancer services and what more I can do to support them in their ambition to increase survival rates. The delivery of the cancer strategy has the potential to improve outcomes and experience for thousands of patients across England and while progress has been made over the past two years we won't achieve world class cancer outcomes for patients if we do not reduce the demand on the NHS caused by preventable risk factors such as smoking or obesity. Nor will we do so unless we can address shortages in the diagnostic workforce. I hear nothing but praise for the Oncology Unit at Maidstone Hospital, but sadly local screening services and early diagnosis statistics are below average for the country as are our treatment referral waits and access to radiotherapy. Hopefully the Government's £20bn injection into the NHS will go some way to address this because investment in prevention and cure is the only way we beat this hideous disease.