# Mother given months to live after two-year bowel cancer misdiagnosis sparks fundraising fight



A mother of two, Julie Butler, has been given just months to live after an agonising two-year battle to receive a correct diagnosis for her bowel cancer. The 55-year-old from Yorkshire faced escalating symptoms that began in early 2020, including severe abdominal pain and significant weight gain, which she experienced despite maintaining her diet and exercise routine. Julie's initial consultations with her GP resulted in scans aimed at identifying potential issues with her reproductive organs, leading to a misdiagnosis linked to fibroids—non-cancerous growths that often form in or around the uterus.

In a cruel twist of fate, the worsening pandemic led to delays in critical treatment; a hysterectomy intended to alleviate her symptoms was postponed for two years. By then, she had developed extreme bloating and pain that left her so incapacitated she could "barely walk." When she underwent surgery in July 2022, doctors discovered tumours in her lower bowel that had already progressed significantly.

Despite the initial optimism following the removal of tumours and a recommendation for chemotherapy, Julie’s health continued to deteriorate. A follow-up year later revealed the shocking news: the cancer had metastasised, spreading to her lungs, liver, and spleen, placing her firmly in the stage four category—widely regarded as incurable. The emotional toll was palpable; she contemplated the possibility of not being there to witness her granddaughter’s milestones, a heart-wrenching concern shared by countless families touched by cancer.

Julie's situation highlights a troubling trend in the UK healthcare system. A 2019 study published in the BMJ noted that thousands of bowel cancer cases were missed due to 'unacceptable' testing failures, with some colonoscopy units recording missed cancer rates almost three times higher than others. Such diagnostic shortcomings have led to nearly 4,000 preventable cancers over nine years, emphasising the urgent need for improved standards and training in medical diagnostics and interventions.

With approximately 44,000 new bowel cancer diagnoses in the UK each year, Cancer Research UK reveals that one in 20 women and one in 17 men will be diagnosed with the disease at some point in their lives. Alarmingly, recent research indicates a global increase in bowel cancer cases among individuals under 50, suggesting a shift in demographic patterns. In England, rates are climbing at an average of 3.6% annually. Researchers attribute some of this increase to lifestyle factors, highlighting the consumption of ultra-processed foods and advocating for healthier dietary choices as a means of prevention.

Julie's husband, Robert, is now spearheading a fundraising campaign to secure £40,000 for a pioneering treatment in Germany known as Transarterial Chemoembolization (TACE), which could potentially prolong her life. This specialised procedure delivers chemotherapy directly to the blood vessels supporting a tumour, effectively starving the cancer of necessary nutrients. However, TACE is typically reserved for cases of primary liver cancer rather than secondary cancers like Julie's, illustrating the bureaucratic barriers patients often face when seeking life-saving treatments.

In addition, the emotional strain of navigating the healthcare system while battling cancer has been compounded by financial stress. Robert is determined to exhaust all possible avenues for treatment and has been overwhelmed by community support for his wife. “The fact that people have been donating to help Julie shows that angels exist and there are good people out there,” he expressed, capturing the solidarity of a community desperately rallying around those facing similar health crises.

As Julie and her family wait for the uncertainty of the future, her story serves as a poignant reminder of the urgent need for timely medical intervention and the importance of addressing systemic failures within the healthcare system. It reinforces the call to action for both healthcare professionals and the public to remain vigilant about the signs and symptoms of bowel cancer—a disease that remains preventable in many cases.

With an average of 16,800 people succumbing to bowel cancer annually in the UK, awareness and education about the disease are paramount. Early detection remains one of the most effective tools in combatting this pervasive illness, and the improvement of diagnostic practices could save lives like Julie's.

**Reference Map:**

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14727671/Mum-told-3-months-live-doctors-missed-easy-dismiss-bowel-cancer-signs-two-years.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14727671/Mum-told-3-months-live-doctors-missed-easy-dismiss-bowel-cancer-signs-two-years.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
3. Paragraph 3: [[2]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/11/13/thousands-bowel-cancer-cases-missed-due-unacceptable-testing/)
4. Paragraph 4: [[3]](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/bowel-cancer/inc), [[4]](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/bowel-cancer)
5. Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14727671/Mum-told-3-months-live-doctors-missed-easy-dismiss-bowel-cancer-signs-two-years.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.gadsbywicks.co.uk/case-studies/bowel-cancer-misdiagnosis)
6. Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14727671/Mum-told-3-months-live-doctors-missed-easy-dismiss-bowel-cancer-signs-two-years.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.ibblaw.co.uk/insights/blog/misdiagnosis-bowel-cancer-family-gp-negligence-victim-awarded-payment-high-court)
7. Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14727671/Mum-told-3-months-live-doctors-missed-easy-dismiss-bowel-cancer-signs-two-years.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
8. Paragraph 8: [[7]](https://www.cancer.org/latest-news/colorectal-cancer-awareness-month.html)
9. Paragraph 9: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14727671/Mum-told-3-months-live-doctors-missed-easy-dismiss-bowel-cancer-signs-two-years.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14727671/Mum-told-3-months-live-doctors-missed-easy-dismiss-bowel-cancer-signs-two-years.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/11/13/thousands-bowel-cancer-cases-missed-due-unacceptable-testing/> - A 2019 study published in the BMJ revealed that thousands of bowel cancer cases were missed due to 'unacceptable' testing failures. The research found that some colonoscopy providers had rates of missed cancers three times higher than others, with the worst units failing to detect nearly 10% of cases. This variation led to nearly 4,000 additional cases that could have been prevented or treated sooner over a nine-year period. The study emphasized the need for uniform high standards in colonoscopy procedures to reduce the number of missed diagnoses and improve mortality rates from this preventable disease.
3. <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/bowel-cancer/inc> - Cancer Research UK provides comprehensive statistics on bowel cancer, highlighting that 1 in 20 UK females and 1 in 17 UK males will be diagnosed with the disease in their lifetime. The organization also notes that 54% of bowel cancer cases in the UK are preventable. Risk factors include consuming processed meat (13% of cases), being overweight or obese (11%), drinking alcohol (6%), smoking (7%), exposure to ionizing radiation (2%), insufficient physical activity (5%), and low fiber intake (28%). These statistics underscore the importance of lifestyle choices in reducing the risk of developing bowel cancer.
4. <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/bowel-cancer> - Cancer Research UK reports that bowel cancer is the second most common cause of cancer death in the UK, accounting for 10% of all cancer deaths. Approximately 16,800 people die from bowel cancer annually, with around 9,200 deaths in males and 7,600 in females. Mortality rates are highest in individuals aged 90 and over, with nearly 58% of all bowel cancer deaths occurring in those aged 75 and over. Since the early 1970s, bowel cancer mortality rates have decreased by almost half, with a 45% reduction in the UK, highlighting improvements in early detection and treatment.
5. <https://www.gadsbywicks.co.uk/case-studies/bowel-cancer-misdiagnosis> - A case study from Gadsby Wicks details the tragic story of Miss M, who suffered from symptoms like rectal bleeding, constipation, and back pain over three years. Despite multiple visits to her GP and A&E, her condition was misdiagnosed as an anal fissure and coccydynia. It wasn't until an MRI revealed an abnormality in her bowel that she was diagnosed with bowel cancer. Unfortunately, by then, the cancer had progressed, leading to her death two years later. The case underscores the critical importance of timely and accurate diagnosis in improving survival rates for bowel cancer patients.
6. <https://www.ibblaw.co.uk/insights/blog/misdiagnosis-bowel-cancer-family-gp-negligence-victim-awarded-payment-high-court> - In 2014, the family of David Malleby, a 44-year-old father who died in 2012 after his GP failed to diagnose his bowel cancer, was awarded a six-figure payment at the High Court. Despite presenting symptoms indicative of early-stage bowel cancer and a family history of the disease, Malleby was misdiagnosed with an anal fissure. Medical experts testified that early detection could have led to a full recovery. The case highlights the devastating consequences of misdiagnosis and the importance of healthcare professionals recognizing and acting upon early signs of bowel cancer.
7. <https://www.cancer.org/latest-news/colorectal-cancer-awareness-month.html> - The American Cancer Society observes Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month in March, aiming to raise awareness about the disease, which is the third most common cancer diagnosed in the United States. In 2023, approximately 153,020 new cases were expected, with an estimated 52,550 deaths. The campaign emphasizes the importance of early detection through screening, as early-stage colorectal cancer often has no symptoms. The survival rate is 64% at five years following diagnosis and 58% at ten years, underscoring the critical role of awareness and timely medical intervention in improving outcomes.