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## Canberra Weekly

Thursday 16/11/2017

Page: 36  
Section: General News  
Region: Canberra, AU  
Circulation: 43478  
Type: Magazines Lifestyle  
Size: 480.00 sq.cms.



# slice

CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

## NET cancer: early detection is key

Imagine being 27 years old, travelling to London to build your career, with the world at your feet. But once you arrive, you start dropping weight, a little at first and then dramatically. You visit a GP, they run some tests, tell you everything is okay and send you home again. A few weeks go by and you lose more weight. You return to the doctor again and again, more blood tests, nothing. You are diagnosed with anxiety and told to eat more, exercise less. It isn't until you return home to Australia in January that your local GP runs further testing and discovers a 1.3kg tumour on your liver. It's not anxiety, it's cancer ...

This is Kate's Ellison's story, a 27-year-old teacher from Tuggeranong. After completing her Bachelor of Education at the University of Canberra and spending a few years working in the ACT, Kate travelled to London in 2016 to build her career and embark on a new life in the UK.

Once in London, Kate almost immediately started dropping weight, but having suffered 'food sensitivities' for years, she initially didn't think anything of it.

"The first few kilos really didn't trigger any alarms for me. I was so excited building my new life and career that I didn't want to think about my health. I certainly didn't think that in 12 months' time I would be diagnosed with neuroendocrine (NET) cancer."

However, those first few kilos quickly turned into 8kg and Kate felt it was time to go to the GP.

"Initially the doctor didn't seem too concerned; we spoke about my food allergies and she ran some blood tests, but all tests that were carried out came back negative and I was sent away. When weight continued to fall off me and I returned to the GP, she diagnosed me with anxiety and suggested I increase my food intake and reduce my cardio at the gym."

Kate followed the doctor's instructions. Kate's housemate was a rugby player and she was matching him meal for meal, yet her weight continued to drop. By the time Christmas came around Kate had lost over 15kg.

"I was preparing to return home to Canberra in January and felt like a shadow of my former self. I'd been diagnosed with anxiety, but deep down by this stage I knew something else wasn't right."

When Kate stepped off the plane in Australia, her mother's face fell at the sight of her daughter's shrinking frame. She begged Kate to visit their family GP.

The tests that Kate's GP ran showed an aggressive tumour was growing on her liver and Kate's doctors warned her that without a transplant she would only have months to live. However, before that could even happen she would need surgery immediately to remove the tumour and stop her liver from rupturing. On 25 February, two of Australia's top surgeons removed a 1.3kg tumour from Kate's tiny torso, leaving an upside-down T-shaped incision that stretches from her sternum to her belly button. Biopsy results from the tumour came back and Kate was diagnosed with neuroendocrine (NET) cancer.

NET cancer can present in the body as slow-growing or aggressive tumours, which, left undetected, can spread to other parts of

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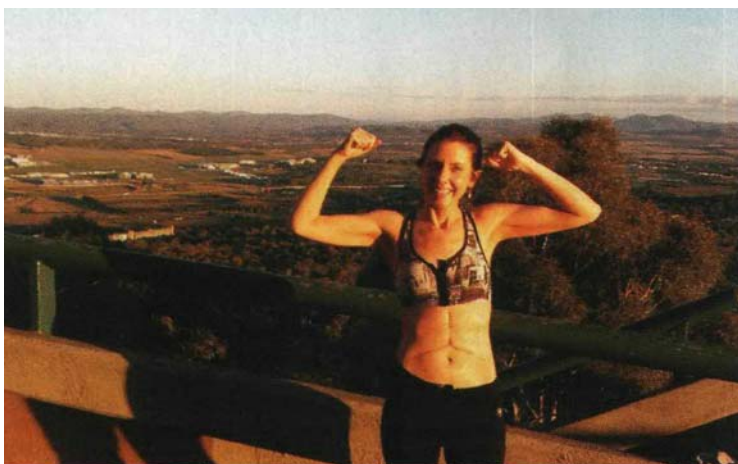


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Following surgery to remove a 1.3kg tumour from her torso, local teacher Kate Ellison will compete in a triathlon on 3 December to raise funds for the Unicorn Foundation, a not-for-profit medical charity providing specialised support to people living with neuroendocrine (NET) cancer.

the body.

Commonly located in the pancreas, lungs, abdomen, reproductive organs and bowel, NET symptoms can include weight loss, hot flushes, shortness of breath and diarrhoea. Sadly, NETs are frequently misdiagnosed with conditions such as anxiety, menopause, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) or diabetes.

In fact, 60-80% of patients have advanced stage NET cancer by the time they are correctly diagnosed and there is currently no cure. Early detection is the key.

Kate has temporarily relocated to Melbourne where she is receiving treatment at the world-renowned cancer treatment facility, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. Throughout her journey Kate has found solace and support from the Unicorn Foundation.

Established in 2009 by Simone Leyden and her brother Dr John Leyden, due to the untimely death of their sister Kate at the age of 35, the Unicorn Foundation is Australia's only foundation providing specialised support to people living with NETs and lobbying for much needed funding in the quest to find a cure.

With no magic pill available to cure NETs, almost 12 months after her initial diagnosis, Kate Ellison's journey continues as she prepares to receive Peptide Receptor Radionuclide Therapy (PRRT). Remarkably before this treatment commences, Kate has

decided to run a triathlon with her partner Jack on Sunday 3 December to help raise funds for the Unicorn Foundation.

"The radiation is not curative but for a lot of people it does have excellent outcomes and it may just give me the time we need to find a cure. I am just one story, one face in a crowd that is hopeful and waiting for a breakthrough in research, but in the meantime there is no cure and so I urge people to be aware of the symptoms, to not be afraid to push their GPs and to request more tests. With neuroendocrine cancers, if you don't suspect it, you can't detect. With no cure, early detection is key."

Anyone who is concerned that they may have (or know someone with) neuroendocrine cancer should contact their GP or the Unicorn Foundation [[unicornfoundation.org.au](http://unicornfoundation.org.au)].