



The power of words

→ Kathy Redmond ■ EDITOR

Blogging – a novel form of Internet communication – is starting to enter the cancer world. A ‘blogger’ is someone who posts their thoughts and opinions to an online journal (called a ‘web log’ or ‘blog’). The best bloggers are insiders – people who can candidly describe a particular reality, warts and all.

Ivan Noble was a wonderful blogger. Tragically, he died last month after a two-year struggle with a high-grade glioma. His online diary, started soon after being diagnosed, charted his fight against a particularly aggressive cancer – his frustrations, fears and despair as well as hopes, dreams and joys. He wanted to use his ability as a technology reporter to help demystify the disease, but later he moved on to explore, with painful clarity, how to carry on living a full life in the face of enormous uncertainty.

E-mails flooded in from all over the world whenever he posted an entry. Many of them were published on the same page. Some people wanted to share their own cancer stories; others wanted to offer support or tell Ivan about the strength they took from his courage and tenacity. It was a dialogue of solidarity in the face of adversity. In acknowledging the painful reality of living with a life-threatening disease,

Ivan prompted fellow cancer sufferers, their friends and families, to speak about their experiences – the positive and the harrowing. He helped people make sense of an unfathomable situation.

Ivan got a lot out of writing his diaries. He was determined to fight back against the powerlessness of his grim situation and make something good out of bad. He said he wanted to “prove that it was possible to survive and beat cancer and not to be crushed by it.” Though he knew he was dying, he wrote “I feel I managed it. I have not been defeated.” His diaries helped take Ivan out of himself and allowed him to retain a sense of continuity with his ‘previous’ life. He believed that the messages of support and insight he received from readers helped him survive for as long as he did.

Ivan Noble’s Tumour Diary, and the responses it evoked, show the power of narration in helping people cope with a devastating life crisis. The cancer community owes Ivan a debt of gratitude for sharing so frankly and eloquently all the unpredictable ups and downs of his cancer journey.

Ivan’s diaries can be viewed at BBC News Online (www.bbc.co.uk). A collection of his diary postings will be published later this year by Hodder