



**Survivor Story: Nick Howe**  
**Eppley Fire and Rescue Department, Nebraska, Firefighter/EMT**  
**Diagnosed Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma in 2016**

"We as firefighters do not like to ask for help, but that doesn't mean we don't need it. The reality is, we do need help, and Firefighter Cancer Support Network is here to provide just that."



Four years ago, at the age of 31, I was diagnosed with a very aggressive, life-threatening type of Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. This type of lymphoma is unfortunately very common and accounts for 22 percent of all lymphoma cases each year. My journey wasn't easy. Upon being diagnosed with stage three Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, I was facing liver failure, kidney failure, I had a feeding tube strapped to my face, and was having significant weight-loss. I was in immense pain, both physical and emotional. I endured two years of treatments ranging from chemotherapy, immunotherapy, autologous stem-cell transplant, and more chemotherapy, and various medical trials.

When I was diagnosed with cancer, one of my first of many fears was losing my career as a firefighter. As firefighters we witness the effect's cancer has on our patients that we respond to. Witnessing this gives us a

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greater understanding of what we could potentially expect when faced with a cancer diagnosis ourselves. In the time of my initial diagnosis, I didn't know what I was going to do.

I remember asking my nurse, if and when would I lose my hair? Her response was, "If you do not lose your hair 17 - 22 days after your first treatment, then you probably won't lose your hair at all." The reason behind my question was to see if I would be able to hide my diagnosis from the guys at the firehouse. I didn't want my abilities as a firefighter doubted.

A cancer diagnosis leaves you, your family, and your close friends, fearing for your survival. Then you add in the stress of the financial burden a cancer diagnosis places on your life. Simply put, life still moves forward and your responsibilities in that life do not stop the moment you are diagnosed with cancer. Then you have the stress of how your body changes with every passing treatment you receive. You fight to maintain your physical ability to do your job as a firefighter. Your life as you once knew it quickly becomes unrecognizable. I lost my hair two weeks after my first treatment and was forced to tell my fellow firefighters that I had cancer.

To be honest, it was so hard to have that discussion, but after we did, the support was second-to-none. Due to that support, after two years of battling cancer I would return to full duty as a firefighter. Since reaching my first 100 days of remission, I have vowed to pay that kindness my family and I received, forward. That is when I found the FCSN family and made it my mission to do my part to help fellow firefighters navigate their journey with the full support of FCSN. We as firefighters do not like to ask for help, but that doesn't mean we don't need it. The reality is, we do need help, and FCSN is here to provide just that.

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