



**Survivor Story: Steve Shapira**  
**Captain, Saint Paul, Minnesota Fire Department**  
**Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, 2014**

"I literally went from healthy and Captaining a crew of 4 to sitting often alone getting poison (chemotherapy) pumped in my veins to hopefully destroy the uncontrolled growing monster inside, CANCER."



My FCSN journey. March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014 forever changed my life. I received the news no one wants to hear, "You have cancer" I was told by my now oncologist. Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma to be exact. At that point I knew everything in my life was about to change. Will I survive? My position as Captain on the St. Paul, Minnesota Fire Department would be in jeopardy, my relationship with my wife and children, my finances, nothing was going to be unaffected by my diagnosis.

After my treatment plan was established, 8 aggressive rounds of chemotherapy followed by 20 "maintenance" rounds, I immediately started researching the root cause. It did not take long to find the Firefighter Cancer Support Network, and in reality FCSN found me. With the available online resources, I was quickly able to establish that my cancer was occupationally related. At that point, I had never even heard of occupational firefighter cancer! Soon after, my SPFD co-worker, Mark Dickinson who was Minnesota State Director, contacted me and brought me on board as an instructor and Assistant State Director. My initial cancer awareness teaching was to my department while I was still taking chemo!!

**Our Vision:** To be the global leader in firefighter cancer support, awareness, and education.

**Our Mission:** To assist firefighters and EMS providers and their immediate families diagnosed with cancer by providing badge to badge support, training and guidance.



In 2016 Chief Dickinson transitioned out of the State Director position and I took over the State Director's duties. I am proud to say FCSN's training has changed the culture of firefighting in Minnesota! We have directly or indirectly touched nearly 75% of the 780 fire departments and approximately 20,000 Minnesota firefighters. We are recognized state-wide as the standard for cancer awareness information and curriculum.

FCSN Minnesota also has informal partnerships with the St. Paul Fire Foundation and the Minnesota Firefighter Initiative who share similar missions in promoting firefighter health and wellness. We continue working with the local American Cancer Society and the Angel Foundation who share our vision for education, health & wellness, and financial stability for firefighters who have received a diagnosis.

Moving forward, Caleb Feine, Assistant State Director established an FCSN Minnesota newsletter to keep our state updated on the current state of firefighter cancer. With a succession plan in place, Captain Feine will be taking over as State Director sometime in 2022 and Minnesota will be in great hands.

Looking back, I can honestly say FCSN and Western Vice President, Curtis Dunn have been lifesavers for me with the support they provided. The depth of despair you receive from a cancer diagnosis cannot be measured. I literally went from healthy and Captaining a crew of 4 to sitting often alone getting poison (chemotherapy) pumped in my veins to hopefully destroy the uncontrolled growing monster inside, CANCER.

I sometimes cannot put into words what it feels like to have gone from never being sick or injured in my entire 17-year career to having it all taken away. The feeling of out being out of control of your own destiny is not a pleasant one. FCSN gave me hope, a purpose and a sense that I needed to be part of a solution. That continues to this day which is why I volunteer and why I have helped create the state-wide network that FCSN is today. We are here to serve firefighters, sometimes in their darkest hours. To provide comfort, education, mentoring, and often the shared experience of suffering this dreaded disease. That is what FCSN means to me and why it will be a part of me forever.

**Our Vision:** To be the global leader in firefighter cancer support, awareness, and education.

**Our Mission:** To assist firefighters and EMS providers and their immediate families diagnosed with cancer by providing badge to badge support, training and guidance.