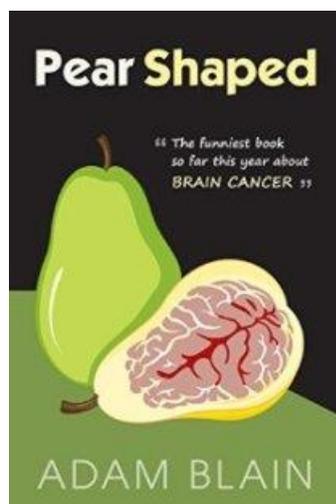


**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**

BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



Pear shaped (2015)

Blain A.

CreateSpace Independent Publishing
Platform, 2015.

140pp.

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This is most useful for those with a recent diagnosis or going through treatment. It is not too long and is easy to understand and written in a friendly, funny way that doesn't detract from the serious nature of the subject. I like how easy a read this is. It is very refreshing and made me laugh a few times and gave off a positive energy.

Family member of a brain tumour patient (26-35) (January 2018)

This would be useful for a friend or relative at diagnosis or early stages. It is easy to read, and I love the design and the way the chapters are laid out. I will probably recommend it. I laughed and laughed at some bits and now follow Adam on Twitter.

I have lost a number of family members to cancer (46-55) (October 2017)

Potential readers need to have an open mind and accept modern language and black humour before they read this. It is extremely clear and stimulating and very frank and open. It is most useful for the reactions and short journey of someone diagnosed with brain tumour; it is an interesting picture of the reaction to a diagnosis of brain tumour.

It is an easy read and the story comes over as a very honest and natural reaction from someone who did not expect to be affected. The author is only 44 at the time of writing but the impact is very significant on his family. It is a very different paperback; cancer is a small word on the cover and is kept at arm's length in a humorous (but black humour) fashion.

This book contains language and humour that may offend. It is explicit in some of its descriptions, but if you accept that it is an excellent, well-written and honest picture of the reaction of a man struck by and being treated for a brain tumour. I look forward to his follow-up book as the feeling is that he will survive and write more!

Living with prostate cancer (Over 75) (August 2016)



This book rarely touches on the specifics of the author's diagnosis but shows that you can continue to have a fulfilling life during treatment. Importantly, the author doesn't ignore the side effects but describes them, and the many activities he is still able to do, with humour.

It is easy to understand and relatively simple to read, running in order from diagnosis to the present day. The tone is very informal, with humour throughout. Some readers may find the language inappropriate, but it adds to the honesty of the narrative. In terms of looks and layout, the book is very simple, but this doesn't detract from the content. The short chapters make it easy to dip in and out, whilst continuing to read other books. Some photos would give context to the situations described.

I like the consistent, informal nature of the book and the description of the activities in which the author can still participate, particularly punting with his friends! I found this quite uplifting – some people may view their diagnosis as a barrier to maintaining some level of 'normality'. At times, an honest account of the author's emotions during the more difficult times would have been useful. Whilst this is touched upon, it is often glossed over with humour, which could make the book difficult to relate to. However, overall, it's an enjoyable read that is laugh-out-loud funny at times. Some readers may not relate to all the content, but I recommend it to those who are newly diagnosed with a brain tumour.

Son of lung cancer patient (Under 25) (March 2018)

I read this book from the perspective of a close family member and it gave me insight to how the patient may feel. Often, they will put on a brave face to try to stop you worrying. It is useful for the practical difficulties, from changes in behaviour and memory, to how others treat you. As the author says, the simple question of "How are you" becomes "So, ...how ARE you?" which has much more meaning. It gave me insight into life after treatment; things that came so easily now need more thought.

The cover cleverly links to the title (the author has a brain tumour the size of a pear). The preface introduces the author, and the first chapter starts with the day he was diagnosed. The book then follows his journey through treatment, time with family and friends, and the impact on his future. Everything is explained very well, sometimes with humour. It is well written, and you can picture the people in the book. It is in parts funny and inspiring, how the author continued with his life, his friends and family, and kept going the best way he could, trying always to look forward.

I enjoyed the author's style. Some chapters could have been shorter, for example, that on superpowers, but overall it is well written from the heart. The humour is refreshing; it does not take anything away from such a very difficult, life-changing time, but the author has approached it in a way that may help others feel at ease.

My father has kidney cancer that has spread to his brain. He has undergone radiotherapy (36-45) (July 2017)

This short book is well worth reading. It begins with Adam's diagnosis day and then describes the events and experiences that follow. It covers a full range of emotions and has useful information about what to expect when going through surgery and treatment, how this might affect the body and the brain's normal functioning, and how to face a brain tumour as a patient, or as a family member or friend of the patient.

I like the overall style. The book is not complicated with technical or medical jargon, but where used, the author points out much simpler terms or analogies. His plain and frank style, smattered with humour, really makes it an uncomplicated read. The cover is well designed and highlights the theme of "the pear". I am always looking for good quality paper in a book and this one hits the mark. The font is very easy to read, and the pages are well laid out. A plus is the brevity of the sections. Lengthy chapters or passages can be difficult to get through with such hard-hitting subjects. The short chapters helped me to continue reading and enjoy this book more.

I have read other books that were incredibly sad and stirred up deep emotions from my father's death. In this instance, the style and dark humour made this a more light-hearted and matter-of-fact account. The humour helped to lessen such devastating news and the reality of a life that would be shorter than expected. He shows great spirit and an acceptance of the future (however long or short). It is a great reminder that we must make the most of each day and our time with family and friends, get out into the world and tick things off our bucket lists. Some readers may not like the dark humour, but that is personal preference. I found it "refreshing", if that can be used to describe an author using his own style and manner in how to approach his condition.

Father died from abdominal cancer (36-45) (June 2017)

This book is useful for all aspects of going through cancer. Although it is about a specific brain tumour, it is a universal read. I like the author's logic. He's been through a devastating prognosis, yet there's no self-pity or moaning. He writes with a good sense of humour and puts a positive spin on a very bad situation. It is easy to understand, using layman's terms. I'm not keen on the cover. The picture of a brain inside a pear is off putting (eating a fruit that is, not reading the book).

I am not a dietician and don't follow the 5-a-day rule myself, but I agree with the logic that, overall, eating well is better for the body and mind than eating badly. The author comments that it's "rubbish" juicing veg in the hope of curing cancer. This could lead people not to bother at all with healthy eating. His dismissal of alternative therapies (such as meditation, astrology, detoxing) seems harsh. I imagine there is no harm in believing something if it helps you get through the day. However, overall, it's a good read. It flows well and is easy to get into and finish in a day.

Relative of a brain tumour patient (26-35) (August 2016)



This is a book for anyone and everyone, but especially for those living with a brain tumour. It is useful for exploring many aspects, although you have to weed through the humour and internal dialogue for hardcore medical facts as opposed to personal experience and opinion. It is easy to understand. Terms and some procedures are explained in a humorous way. The humorous style may not appeal to all and there are many asides that interrupt the flow.

After reading the first pages, I thought I wouldn't like it. However, as I read more, and stopped reading every set of italics, I discovered that I could pick and choose which sections to read, with no loss to the sense or meaning. I especially enjoyed the chapter on charlatans. Many cancer patients may throw up their hands in horror, but I found it refreshing that he decided not to go on a special diet or seek an alternative cure. "If the answer to cancer was broccoli, why would the NHS spend millions on treatment and research?" He has a point. A man after my own heart.

Living with cancer (myelodysplastic syndrome) (46-55) (August 2017)

Someone with this type of cancer may be able to relate well to the issues discussed or indeed see humour as a new way of looking at things. When he finished the book, the author did not know how much time he had left but remained comical and realistic throughout. It may be most useful for someone during treatment. It may be too much to take in at the beginning, and possibly a little too raw after treatment has finished as the author's treatment hasn't successfully beaten the cancer. As it is very comical and witty, it may also appeal to members of the public.

It is easy to understand in the main; the author does recount some technical aspects of diagnosis and treatment, but these are generally explained well in non-technical terms. It was sometimes difficult to keep up with the story as the author often went off on a tangent. The cover is interesting although the title doesn't suggest it is anything to do with cancer and so you rely on the review on the front to understand this.

This author has chosen to make his journey through diagnosis and treatment a witty and often sarcastic one; this somehow helps the reader feel a little better about reading about such a terrible illness. I particularly enjoyed his sense of humour and how he describes his "Superpowers", seemingly enhanced senses due to the tumour.

I was a carer for my mother with metastatic breast cancer in the brain (46-55) (August 2017)

This is a personal account of how Adam Blain managed his illness and his relationship with his wife. It could be read at any stage and is most useful for the psychological aspects of living with a brain tumour; there is a small amount of practical help. It is most useful for someone with a brain tumour, their family, and friends, and professionals in palliative care.

It is easy to understand, and the language is appropriate. The cover is well designed and appropriate. The general layout is fine, and the book is well thought out and written, which one would expect from an educated author.

I like Adam's bravery in going so deeply into his account of not only his illness, but its impact on friends and family, especially his wife. He is very open about his emotions and fears. He describes well how, as soon as a diagnosis is made, you are sucked into the world of the NHS whether you want to be or not. I was struck by a similarity to my situation in that Adam named his tumour "The pear". My late husband's tumour looked like two chick peas and that is how we referred to it, "The chick peas". Somehow naming the tumour gives it an identity and life of its own.

As the widow of a brain tumour patient, I would not describe this book as exactly appealing. Adam handled his illness with black humour and goes off at seemingly irrelevant tangents. Some might find this awkward. The digressions could last several pages and were detrimental to the flow and towards the end I wanted to skip them. Wearing my therapist hat however, I understand this to be a defence against, and a distraction from, his acute psychological pain. I found the black humour difficult and upsetting at times, perhaps because it is so very different from how my late husband, a highly intelligent and educated man like the author, managed his situation.

Adam wrote this book to raise money to help support his family after he dies. As a therapist, I found it an excellent form of self-expression, but it is not useful for anyone seeking support or information about brain tumours or their treatment. Brain tumours present differently depending on their location, type and grade. Adam was spared any change in personality or cognition and appeared to be bodily independent and able and this could be misleading.

Widow of brain tumour (anaplastic astrocytoma Grade 4) patient and retired health care professional in palliative care (56-65) (May 2017)

This is a relatively short book, with chapters that are more like blog posts, making it easy for people to read when their concentration is low. It is easy to understand, with no technical data. It is perhaps most useful post diagnosis and learning to live with cancer but to appreciate it, you need to share the author's sense of humour.

I found the first half a little irritating, largely due to the style. If you don't share the same sense of humour, you may find it weak and predictable. However, I did warm to the author in the second half. The content and tone didn't change so much. I started to feel that I was getting to know the author a little better. I could identify a little more with him in terms of having to think about the practicalities of what happens to you and your family when you are facing your mortality. Whilst I don't share his sense of humour, I do share his attitude of trying to look at these things with a sense of humour. I will recommend it to others with a similar sense of humour.

Friend of a carer of someone with a brain tumour (36-45) (April 2017)

This is a very funny, black-humoured book that doesn't dwell on the illness but is unique in its approach. Anyone could read it – it is very tongue in cheek and upbeat – but it will not be very helpful for those wanting more information about treatment.

It is easy to understand and there is no need for a glossary. However, the author's approach is haphazard making it a difficult read; the pages don't flow and there are no obvious chapters. It does however follow a chronological path from diagnosis. The cover is appealing, and the book is not obviously medical from the illustration.

The author is highly engaging, and the book is a quick read. I like the dark humour. It doesn't feel like a serious book about cancer but may not appeal to everyone because of this. I don't like the lack of medical information and treatment details.

Health professional (46-55) (December 2016)

The subjects in this book are a reality, so have the potential to cause distress. For this reason, it may be appropriate for older teens but is more suited to adults. It deals with all aspects of the cancer journey in a cynical, light-hearted manner. The many fears and anxieties of brain tumour patients are sensitive, distressing and considered taboo by relative and carers. The book allows the patient to have these fears, and anxieties; they may be able to relate to the author and feel less alone. By talking about dying and funerals, for example, it gives patients (and carers and relatives) the opportunity to approach and deal with these distressing topics. Some people may find it a cheerful read but it will depend on their sense of humour. It provides a valuable insight for those without cancer into what a brain tumour diagnosis entails, but the light-hearted and flippant style belittles the cancer experience.

The book follows the typical cancer experience, from life before diagnosis, through diagnosis and treatment, to life after cancer. It is very descriptive, so many patients will be able to relate to it and feel an affinity with the author, enabling them not to feel alone. Some readers may find it amusing, which will improve their mental state, but others may find it distressing – it will depend on their sense of humour. In the latter third, the reader can perceive the author's feelings of anger at the unfairness of his condition. This may help patients feel it is okay to feel this way instead of being told that they are “wrong” or “being negative” by somebody who has not experienced cancer. It also gives hope of some degree of normal life after treatment.

It is well written, easy to read and understand. It is uncomplicated, in short sections, and I like the use of different script types. This not only adds interest but provides natural breaks for the reader if they are getting tired or concentration is dwindling. The author uses few technical terms and explains abbreviations. He gives enough background information (health, family, work), to make the narrative easy to follow. There are some references to film characters, which the reader may not know, and some of the phrasing ideally requires clarification. However, there are only a few of these, and the reader can follow what is meant. The language is occasionally crude and offensive, but not often enough to make the reader put the book down. I

The cover illustration is a clever and a subtle representation of the content and style. The text is comfortable to read, and the use of different fonts clearly define when the

author is talking about his or another person's thoughts. This technique also adds interest and helps if reading when tired. The sections are short, and the general layout is attractive, although I like a contents page to give me an idea of the structure of the book prior to reading. There are no photographs. The tone is initially amusing and light-hearted (I can't say that I found it funny) but then sarcastic, cynical, and satirical. In the final third, the reader can perceive the author's feeling of anger at the unfairness of his situation. Finally, the tone becomes light hearted again.

I didn't notice any inaccuracies (although MRSA does not prefer unpleasant places on/in the body; the usual site of colonisation is the skin and nostril) but, when the author is conversing with his surgeon, the narrative gives the impression that the patient could be left "stupid" or "thick" after surgery. This may be very distressing to readers about to undergo a similar operation. It would be more responsible to write that thinking and behavioural patterns may be affected following surgery, depending on which section of the brain is removed. Similarly, the author's negative portrayal of radiotherapy may cause concerns and anxieties in pre-radiotherapy patients. Fellow patients could easily relate to this well-written, accurate, descriptive, honest account of all aspects of the cancer experience. Many readers will feel an affinity with the author from his description of the various aspects of the health service. The book mentions sensitive and distressing topics e.g. funerals and death. These are often considered "taboo" subjects by the patient's friends and relatives, but this book gives patients permission to have such thoughts and concerns. Similarly, the author avoids "ultra-optimists". This is my first favourite gem, because it gives ME permission to do the same; it's in print so it must be acceptable, hurrah! The second gem is the author's view that he thinks that there is uneven distribution of luck in the world. Hurrah permission 2!! Gem 3 is the message to get as much out of every minute of life as possible. The author's list of acknowledgements, and his appreciation of his family, friends, colleagues, and all involved in his care are very moving.

It is humorous and light-hearted in places, but I found it cynical, satirical, and a bit sick in parts. The humour is sometimes over the top and silly and could be insensitive and distressing. Some of the language is crude and the author is obviously intelligent enough to use alternative wording. The accounts of the duties of some professionals involved in his care are degrading and derogatory. It is also irresponsible to write about using the free prescription certificates – to which cancer patients are entitled – to get medication for other people. This should not be included.

Overall, it is quite useful in an inspiring and positive way. The author writes openly about sensitive and taboo topics, which gives patients permission to accept their own feelings and thoughts and the opportunity to discuss them with others. Because his account is so honest, readers can readily relate to him and feel less isolated. It is also useful to readers who don't have cancer, giving them a valuable insight into the thoughts, feelings, frustrations, and practical difficulties experienced by patients. The author can be assured that the "pear" did not contain his wit. His book isn't really to my taste, but he is amazing to have gone through this trauma and still retained sufficient humour and mental ability to recount his story. I would give any prospective reader a balanced, non-judgemental opinion of the book and leave it up to them to decide if they want to read it – everyone's tastes and situations are different.

Myxoidliposarcoma patient (46-55) (November 2016)

This book is by a 44-year old man diagnosed with a rare and aggressive brain tumour. The title comes from the fact that after surgery to remove the tumour, the surgeon remarks that it was the size and shape of a pear.

The author uses humour and a witty approach to his condition and treatment to help him through what must to, most people, be an unthinkable condition. While we would all agree that there is nothing remotely funny about having a brain tumour, the author deals with this by making amusing and self-deprecating observations about himself, the tumour, and his treatment. He is passive in his attitude to his treatment and does not subscribe seriously to any recommendation of nutritional or complementary treatment. Where many people would seek help via any and every source possible, he continues to enjoy junk food and cynically turns down offers of spiritual and alternative help. He undergoes brain surgery, followed by radiotherapy and chemotherapy. As the book progresses, the reader cannot help but like this man, and wish fervently for his long life, even if unsure at the beginning whether to like his humorous approach. Alongside the humour, there is some good advice: "Prognosis and Maths" (p.80), and the specific "Advice" section (p. 100).

The book travels chronologically from diagnosis to treatment and beyond. The author does not go into much factual detail and doesn't use medical jargon. The text in the book is clearly presented. It is slim (130 pages) and the cover shows a picture of a pear, sliced in half. Under the title is the quotation: "The funniest book so far this year about brain cancer". This may not appeal to potential readers who are unfamiliar with the writing style of the author.

I like that it is a witty book. The author has a great sense of humour. He is quirky and examines life in an interesting way and has a witty and cynical approach to his condition, without being disrespectful to the professionals involved. Although brain cancer is far from being a funny subject, the book considers the condition from the patient's point of view, and he therefore has "permission" to use humour, whereas a medical professional would not! There are small islands of advice and help for others, mostly around survival and making the most of a life that may be limited in time. However, the author seems to regard the brain as being "the mind" or "the intelligence". He does not demonstrate great interest in the "whys" of having certain treatments, just the humour and feelings of being ridiculous that he goes through (e.g. "bits of his brain running out of his nose"). This could distress some readers.

This is a deeply personal account. It may not be relevant for others with a brain tumour from a factual viewpoint, but it addresses our mortality with courage, and speaks the often-unspeakable. It is a memorable read. Humour can be a great defence mechanism for people enduring the unthinkable. The author is witty, and the reader will get to like him through reading his observations. He uses humour to get him through a dreadful situation. This seems to work for him and may help others, but it is not for everyone. It may be most useful for those considering their mortality.

Friend, Former health professional (56-65) (August 2016)



This book focuses mainly on the everyday life of the patient, referencing the social and emotional strains of living with cancer. Though the author talks about the issues of living with a brain tumour, his book mostly pertains to his life and how the cancer has changed some things but not everything.

The aim of the book is to make the patient forget about the gravity of the situation and take life a little less seriously, but the author doesn't address how to cope with problems. Instead, he mentions how it's odd and unsettling that his friends might treat him the same as before his diagnosis, yet differently in certain aspects. And so, although he does address how things have changed for himself, he does not write about how he resolves them or what others should do.

The book is chronological per the author's diagnosis and treatment. The problem is that he does not keep to it; at one moment, he is starting radiotherapy, a page later he has finished and is writing about getting a haircut. He makes little to no mention about the treatment process and mentions chemotherapy or radiotherapy only as a transition into a tangent or an aside while writing about an unrelated topic. At moments, he loses focus and doesn't mention the tumour or living with cancer but instead his ego and mundane events in his life. A section is dedicated to his "superpowers", among them the "superpower" of piling food onto a plate. Throughout, the author mentions how he is only writing the book to earn money for his family. This is possibly a sign of anxiety about the future, but he does not quantify it as that, instead he laments how he'll die one day, offering no consolation to the reader.

It is easy to understand, partly because it has little to do with brain tumours or how to handle life with a brain tumour diagnosis. It is hard to determine if there are any inaccuracies because few specific details are discussed. One could say that it is a factual inaccuracy that the issue of the tumour is not discussed in detail. Instead, the author has imaginary exchanges with his removed tumour (these usually occur when the author is in clinic or with a behavioural psychologist). Though it may be written as a comedy, the level of arrogance and contempt the author seems to display towards the NHS is horrifying. On multiple occasions, he questions the doctors' judgment in his exchanges about whether his "super powers" may have been lost. The cover has an interesting design, but the internal layout is strange and confusing; some pages have only two lines. It could be better organised into chapters or themes and not written as a diary.

I like the moments when the author mentions his reactions to his treatment, such as his hair loss; these are quite in touch and enjoyable. Some of the emotions briefly described are accurate for the diagnosis and treatment process but could have been talked about more. However, overall this book is not at all useful and not recommended for someone looking for advice on how to handle interpersonal relations after a tumour diagnosis, especially a terminal diagnosis. There is no real expansion on why this book was written apart from raising funds for the author when he dies in the future, as he mentions frequently. He seems to be obsessed with the notion of writing a book about cancer without even delving into the experience of

living with cancer. Most of the jokes are not about living with cancer but personal scenarios in his own life that he finds humorous.

The author's remarks about hospital staff, or public-schoolboy enjoyment of tearing apart Chinese restaurants while drunk, overshadow his intention of writing a humorous tale about cancer. Ultimately, this is a book for a patient with a brain tumour, but it is not for everyone. Anyone not struggling themselves and who, despite the book's tagline of being the funniest book about brain cancer, does not need humour to cheer them up might want to read it if they are looking for a short break or escape from their problems. However, I question why it was published. Looking at the Amazon reviews, I feel that the author's friends or family wrote most of them.

Brain tumour patient (WHO II Oligodendroglioma) (18-25) (February 2017)

Further information

Why does Macmillan Cancer Support review books?

We use reviews to help us compile a list of suggested cancer books, the [Macmillan Core Book List](#). Cancer information centres and public libraries can use this list to select appropriate and relevant books for people affected by cancer.

We add reviews to the [Directory of information materials for people affected by cancer](#) so that people affected by cancer can see what others in a similar situation think about a book. You can also see details of all the books reviewed in the [Book reviews listing](#), which also has links to all the reviews.

We recruit most of our reviewers through the [Volunteering Village](#) and the [Cancer Voices Network](#), people affected by cancer who have signed up to help Macmillan Cancer Support in a number of ways. Volunteers are a vital part of our book review process; since 2007, over 1,500 Macmillan volunteers have written more than 6,000 reviews of over 500 different books.

If you are a health professional who would like to review books for us, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Information and support for people affected by cancer

If you are looking for support to help you live life with cancer, you may wish to contact one of [Macmillan's cancer information and support services](#). Or you can call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** (Mon-Fri 9am–8pm). We have an interpreting service in over 200 languages. Just state, in English, the language you wish to use. If you are deaf or hard of hearing you can use textphone no 0808 808 0121 or Text Relay.

You can also email us using the [website enquiry form](#). Alternatively, [visit our website](#).

Feedback

If you have any comments, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Being told ‘you have cancer’ can affect so much more than your health – it can also affect your family, your job, even your ability to pay the bills. But you’re still you. We get that. And, after over 100 years of helping people through cancer, we get what’s most important: that you’re treated as a person, not just a patient.

It’s why we’ll take the time to understand you and all that matters to you, so we can help you get the support you need to take care of your health, protect your personal relationships and deal with money and work worries.

We’re here to help you find your best way through from the moment of diagnosis, so you’re able to live life as fully as you can. For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit macmillan.org.uk

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