

JOHN PATRICK TALKS ABOUT COVID, HIS LUNG TRANSPLANT, AND THE ILFA

MOST of us have given our best to avoid COVID, but we've done that not so much for ourselves as for those most vulnerable to the virus.

John Patrick O'Sullivan, a Lios Póil man, is alive today because of a lung transplant he received in 2016, but COVID therefore presented a clear danger to his own health. By the time he was diagnosed with the virus earlier this winter, he had already seen colleagues from his beloved Irish Lung Fibrosis Association (ILFA) battle COVID, not least fellow county man and friend Gerry Redican, who recovered after a hard battle against the virus in Cork University Hospital in 2020.

"I was diagnosed on November 1," John Patrick tells *The Kerryman*. "I woke up during the night with a harsh cough, a kind that I hadn't got since before my transplant: a horrible, dry cough that would take everything out of you. I said to myself, 'I don't like this!'"

The cough dissipated, but John Patrick's daughter thought it would be wisest to carry out an antigen test the next day.

"I was eating my breakfast and said 'why not?', thinking nothing of it," he says. "She went away to process it in the sitting room, and when she came back, I knew from the look on her face that something was wrong. She said, 'Dad, I'm nearly 100 per cent sure you have COVID!'"

"Instead of feeling sorry for myself at the shock, I rang the Bons in Tralee, told them my situation, and they could get me in at 12pm. I got my PCR, I tested positive that evening, and I was in isolation for 10 days."

John Patrick had been preparing for an imminent booster shot. It's now mid-January, and he still hasn't received that booster. A significant length of time must pass from a COVID diagnosis before receiving the third shot; John Patrick, already considered part of our more vulnerable cohort, might well have received it while having the illness had he and his family not exercised well-placed caution.

By his own admission, it may sound strange to hear someone

'It might sound strange, but I'm very lucky'



John Patrick O'Sullivan at home in An Rinn Bhuí. Photos by Declan Malone.

EARLIER THIS WINTER, JOHN PATRICK O'SULLIVAN FROM LIOS PÓIL, A LUNG TRANSPLANT RECIPIENT, CONTRACTED COVID-19. HE TALKS TO **TADHG EVANS** ABOUT THE VIRUS, LUNG FIBROSIS, AND THE CHARITY THAT SUPPORTS HIM

whose health has taken so many blows over the years describe himself as fortunate. But as a naturally positive person, that's the line he goes with, and he presents his case well.

"I am actually very lucky, again," he insists. "I came out of the 10 days' isolation wondering what all the fuss was about, but it was on the 14th day that the whole thing hit me. The tiredness was overwhelming, incredible...I slept for that whole weekend."

"I was feeling better by Monday, but the aftermath was that my breathing was compromised again - and it was pretty bad for nearly a fortnight - but has been improving since."

"The lung appears to be clear, it seems to have got me in the upper bronchi part of my body rather than the lung, but they're still trying to figure out if it's 100-per-cent right. I've got stronger in the past two weeks, but there's still some after-effect there; they told me it would take about 12 weeks."

"I'm very fortunate, strange as it sounds. I got a lung transplant in August, 2016...and because of the transplant I got five and a half years ago, I'm able to talk to you today. It's incredible what it has done for me, and for those around me as well."

"The man above, fair play to him, he doesn't want me yet. He reckons he has enough lads above there to be talking about football!"

How he contracted the virus, he's not sure. Though he never lost a night's sleep over the pandemic that's changed our world, he remained wary of what it could do to him and exercised all reasonable caution. He never eased up on that, even in the lead-up to November 1.

Aside from ever-present support from family and medical professionals, ILFA members have kept in touch with him since that diagnosis. The charity has been a ballast to John Patrick since he was diagnosed with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis a decade ago, and he has returned that support by helping to raise funds and awareness for the association.

Apart from offering support and guidance to those on their journey with this horrible illness, the charity has worked hard to raise funds and back research into lung fibrosis, boosting chances of better outcomes for those living with it.

And while some patients may receive a terminal diagnosis, that's not to say ILFA won't be there for them.

"I've spoken to very distressed people who've been given a terminal diagnosis," John Patrick says. "They're all over the place. They need someone to talk to

them and remind them they won't die tomorrow, and there's tremendous support there for them."

"I will ask them to become a

member, it's free, but in return ILFA will educate and support the patient, as well as helping research, which is constantly making things better. We have better medication now, it's being diagnosed more quickly, and you see better outcomes the quicker the diagnosis."

"I assume COVID's the reason, though that hasn't been confirmed to me, but we were averaging in the region of 35 lung transplants, and climbing, a year. This year just gone, there were only 20 done. That's the impact the virus seems to have had. I'd like to get out there the importance of carrying a donor card, and making your family aware of your wishes to donate as well."

"Since 2005, less than 250 people have received lung transplants, and I'm one of them. That's the luck I've had. Mine isn't such a bad story at all!"

To learn more about ILFA, visit <https://ilfa.ie/>, or give John Patrick a call at (087) 280 9801. You can also donate to ILFA - which depends on public support - via its website.

To register as an organ donor, you can phone 1890 543 639 or free text DONOR to 50050. Further information on organ donation is available from www.citizensinformation.ie.



John Patrick O'Sullivan in Rinn Bhuí, Lios Póil

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