**BeWell Doha - Episode 4.mp3**

**Speaker 1** [00:00:00] Hi, everyone. Welcome back to be well, Doha. My name is Yana. This episode is going to be a little bit different than the last couple of episodes that we've been recording. Basically, the last couple of episodes have been me introducing a topic and having a couple of guests on, and then we basically just discussed this certain topic and I'd have, you know, some questions prepared. I'd have the topic prepared, I'd have like an entire paragraph ready to read off, and it's all just like, like super structured. And this episode is very different. This episode is basically I have one very special guest. He came up to me a couple of weeks ago and he was talking about how he was excited about the podcast, and he wanted to be on because he wanted to share his story. And I was like, Well, first of all, that's incredible. And I thought, oh, I can just put him in with one of the other episodes because he could just talk about, you know, failure. He could talk about managing health relationships or social media. And then he told me that he has a story that is very rare. His story. He is essentially I'm not going to take away from his spotlight, but he is a cancer survivor. He is very, very brave to be on this podcast and to volunteer to share his story with everybody. So even if you've not, you know, had cancer before, I'm sure every single person on the planet knows someone who's had cancer. And we've all been through difficult days. And I think learning from someone who's been through some pretty difficult days, I'd say, and gone out the other end and just been super strong and super brave, we can all take away from that. We can all be inspired by that, and we can all learn from it. So without further ado, will our special guest please introduce himself?

**Speaker 2** [00:01:39] Hi, guys. My name is Romeo Joseph. I'm a first year student at the University of Aberdeen, and my major is Accounting and Finance, And I'm here to talk about my story.

**Speaker 1** [00:01:49] Yeah. Amazing. So, Romeo, you mentioned that you were a cancer survivor earlier today. Do you want to tell us a little bit more about your story? When were you diagnosed? What were you diagnosed with? How was that process, The beginning stages of it.

**Speaker 2** [00:02:03] I was diagnosed in September 22, 2021. I was diagnosed with a brain tumor. It was very scary. Like I was terrified. To be honest, I didn't know what was going to happen. I don't know. This was before they even told me it was cancer. Just the surgery. I was just saying. What if it's cancerous or if it's spread to other parts of my body? And so it was just like there were no symptoms. I was diagnosed, so I just woke up one day with, like, immense head pain like I couldn't even like there was no side effects. Usually with the brain tumor, it's just like dizziness and vomiting or anything. But for me it's just all the head pain. I could walk normally. I had my normal strength. So, we went to the doctor and like he tested my strength, my, my eyes, everything. And he's like, this is all just stress. Like there's nothing to worry about. He just gave me like a few painkillers, a few like steroid injections for the pain, and then to work like I would go back home and like, the next following night would be like, I couldn't sleep at all. I wouldn't like, I would be like I reached the point where I was in so much pain. I was literally banging my head on the window and like, like begging for help. Basically, I reached that point and we kept going and they kept saying, no interest, stress, stress until the emergency doctor did an X-ray for my neck. And he was like, ah, I found the problem. It's the your neck muscles are being compressed. And he's like, I'm like, okay, this is this would be from the head. You should do scans when from the head, but he is like, No, no, don't worry, this is caused by stress. I'm like, Are you serious? And he's like, this is all stress is like, you're so young. Why are you so stressed?

**Speaker 1** [00:03:49] Oh, my God.

**Speaker 2** [00:03:50] Yeah. I'm like, better to make it to do a scan before we reach a point. And he's like, What about worry? I am a doctor. I know what's wrong with you. If if you had something, there would be other signs. Okay. So, he just gave me another injection. Basically, a special one for the neck muscles. And thankfully, the pain went. But a few hours later, for one week, it was like a special stereo injection that, what they call it, decreases the size of the brain. And so, the pain decreased for one week. Nothing. A week later, it came back even more.

**Speaker 1** [00:04:23] worse Yeah.

**Speaker 2** [00:04:24] Yes. Worse and we went again and again until I got an appointment to the neurologist, and I told them he looked at my file and I told him the story. He was like the other doctor said it was stress is wrong. This has something to do with the nerves of the brain. I'll give you some medicine for that. And I was like, Are you serious right now? I'm just like, Do a scan for the brain just so we can be sure there's nothing here. After a few minutes of arguing, it was cancer of the brain. But just to show you that you're wrong and I'm right, that there's nothing in the brain, I went, This is the funny part. I went to the to do the MRI. Just an MRI scan for the brain. And I came back. I went to his office after That he was like sit down. I want to. I'm going to show you that there's nothing. And he had the big screen behind them so we could see the result. He opened it on his computer and whatever was on his computer was on the screen that I could see. And when it once he opened the scan, he saw the brain and he saw like a huge big, like bulge of white, something white There's something attached. He opened it. And like I'm reminding you that he said there's nothing he's doing the scan to show me that it's all I'm wrong. He opened the screen. He saw this huge bulge. He literally opened his eyes in shock and his mouth. He put his hand on his mouth for like a minute. He kept doing it for 2 minutes. He was zooming in and out of the of the screen of the image. And he was like, come back tomorrow at 3 p.m. I'll be there to discuss it with my team. Come back tomorrow, 3 p.m., because we have to do another scan, but with color as to like. But then so we can see clearly what it is. But said come back tomorrow at three. I went back home that night. Same thing. No sleep at all. I can't like I'm like I couldn't anymore. But by the time it reached, like I stayed awake from, I went back home from the MRI scan. From 10 p.m. to 10 a.m. I was still awake. I didn't sleep at all. I was all in pain. So I said at ten am I told my mom. He said, 3 p.m. but I can't anymore. I need to go back. I need to go back. I need it. And I thought that because he we did the scan, he would put it in the system. So, if I go back now, they can see it. They can do something. I went to the emergency in the private hospital. We told them what happened and they're like, No, no, no, this is stress. This is stress. They saw this thing. That was a stress. I'm like, I'm over here dying and you're and you're like, this is stress again. And like, we started making problems. We demanded them to call him and bring him here. Now they call them and he's like, no, I'm coming at three. And he was like, I was like, I reached. The point was, enough is enough. And yeah, sure. It's a long story short, after they saw the proper after they probably saw the image another neurologist, they said, I need surgery within the next 12 hours or because it's reached the point where my like the water was all stuck in my head, the tumor was blocking the water flow in my head and he's like, We wanted to go to the UK for surgery and it's like, No, no, you can go to the UK because first of all, the air pressure and the plane and second thing. By the time we reached the UK, reached the hospital, 12 hours had been done already. So, we said, we will call Hamad, maybe they have some special recommendation, they'll be able to get you to the UK. I went to Hamad.

**Speaker 1** [00:07:49] The public hospital here, the public medical centers here.

**Speaker 2** [00:07:55] And we, we showed them the scan from the private hospital and we're like they said this I need surgery in the next 12 hours. This sudani doctor. He's in the emergency. He was like, okay, we'll get you an MRI tomorrow. And they said, I need surgery in the next 12 hours. And we told them it's like, no, sorry we filed up. But luckily, I survived the next 12 hours, my brain didn't explode. Yeah. And luckily, I went to the I got the tumor. They told me the next day and I did the surgery, and they removed all the cancer and remove the whole tumor. Thankfully, there was nothing left.

**Speaker 1** [00:08:30] Amazing. Well, okay, first of all, I can't imagine having gone through so many appointments and to so many doctors and being like, I'm in an insane amount of pain and being told time and time again, you're just stressed. You're just stressed. This is like borderline gaslighting. How do you feel like it's affected you emotionally? And obviously, if you weren't stressed before, you're stressed now. They're just telling you you're stressed, you're stressed. It's nothing like just go home, take some painkillers. I can't imagine being borderline gaslighted to that extent. How do you how did you feel in that moment? How did you kind of process it? Did you kind of, you know, feel like, oh, maybe I'm wrong, maybe I'm crazy? Or did you think, no, there's definitely something wrong here and I should have to go get proper medical care to figure it out.

**Speaker 2** [00:09:17] Well, it's speaking about stress. I was already stressed because of the pain. So, like, that's. That's only like, on the first level. And second thing, like, even before I went to before the pain even started, I was like, I felt something in my head. Like, I physically felt that I felt something pushing me, even though it wasn't pain. Does that make sense? Okay, so anyway, they kept telling me I'm stressed, I'm stressed and stressed with all the pain in my head. I'm like, I need to be heard. I need someone to listen. I don't want I don't care that you have your education, what your studies say and the other results. Like, I know there's something I was like that made me even more stressed. I was, like, angry. I just couldn't. Because of the pain, I couldn't express my anger because I was already, like, too tired.

**Speaker 1** [00:10:04] Yeah, it's frustrating. I can't imagine that. My gosh.

**Speaker 2** [00:10:07] I'm even thinking about that now. After everything's done, like, I'm like, I. I'm just. I still feel so angry. Like, I could have, like, died or something.

**Speaker 1** [00:10:16] Absolutely. Yeah. To all future doctors that are potentially listening to this or any current doctors, maybe listen to your patients, when they're telling you that they're in pain and take the safe route as opposed to just being like, Oh, no, no, no. You’re making this all up. It's all in your head.

**Speaker 2** [00:10:34] Like speaking from experience, like it doesn't I don't have to have the symptoms. Like, if there's something wrong, like I don't have any symptoms. Besides head pain and Everyone has headaches, so, like, you should just take extra caution. Especially if you have a private hospital and weren't paying you for this.

**Speaker 1** [00:10:53] Okay, so you ended up getting the MRI and then you ended up getting the surgery. What happened after that?

**Speaker 2** [00:10:59] I was in ICU for like a week, thankfully. But thank God, like a much more religious because of this. But after surgery, they told me don't expect to walk for the next two months because, you know, it's part of the brain surgery or on the part of the brain where you where you walk. Yeah, I got up from the next day and I started walking within. Yeah. So, like, thankfully, I feel like I'm thankful for that. So, I said and then I was, I was able to go back home. But from the second day, my mom saw one of the doctors in the hallway. She didn't tell me this at the time because I was still in ICU and she asked because she asked them how the results were, because they put the tumor in a box or something I did in the lab, and they asked tested if it's cancerous or not. She didn't tell me that at the time. She didn't want to stress me out more, but when she went out and saw a doctor, she asked them How in the hell is the first result going? He was like, It's not good. It's like, it's not good. And he was like, But we'll see the other result because it just says if it's cancerous or not, we'll see the future results to give us more detail. She didn't tell me this, but like, I mean, I don't even know, to be honest, until I left ICU. One week later, I was with my brother, I was having dinner and we were like laughing. I started laughing. I had a nosebleed. I was like, Oh my God, that's not a good sign. We rushed to Emergency and got checked out and thankfully it had nothing to do with the surgery. I don't know why I had to be right next to it after surgery, but they said they had the results of the do you call it the tests? after the tumor, they said it was stage four. Yeah. And especially the size was huge of the tumor. So, I was like, okay, we're going to have to do chemo and radiation and everything. And then I did the scan after that for my whole body. Luckily nothing spread, especially that's, that's amazing. When you have stage four cancer, like the patient is like has cancer around their body. It all spread for me and I'm so lucky it stayed. It didn't spread for me enough. So yeah, I was able to do treatment after

**Speaker 1** [00:13:06] So I understand that you took a gap here when you were going through chemo and radiation. And during that gap year, what were the things that, you know, lifted you up or made your darker days brighter when you were going through something super difficult and super challenging?

**Speaker 2** [00:13:23] Okay. First off, before I get to that, I wanted to say that for anybody like getting like anybody sick or anybody going through stuff, just staying positive is the key. You have to stay positive through everything.

**Speaker 1** [00:13:35] Optimistic?

**Speaker 2** [00:13:36] Yeah, because that's what that's what may be happening through everything. And what helped me actually what kept me positive. First thing was my mom, honestly, she was with me the whole time. Like and to be honest, she was much more stressed than me was. You would see my face. I'm just more of a chill dude. And she'll be like, She's praying, She's praying. She's for me and everything. So, God bless her. I love you, Mom. If you're listening to this. And yeah, I'm just and I have my friends, they would always from school, like they're my brothers. They'll always check up on me and everything. So that that like normal people were there for me and my family and my friends. That kept me strong. And I kept telling myself, You’re not alone. that could be positive.

**Speaker 1** [00:14:23] That's amazing. Is there anything that they would do, in particular your family and friends, that would make it easier for you or that would make it a little less draining every day?

**Speaker 2** [00:14:33] Okay. No, my friends were in the UK, so most I would do this like face time with them sort of. But for me it just would be like they would ask about me, they would just keep on contacting me. For me, that was enough because I understand they're in a different country. They can't do much. Yeah, my family. And they would because I would. I feel my house is like bad vibes after that, after what's happened. So, they would just take me out as much as possible. And that just really helped Me. Just even going for a walk in the mall, going out for it in the park. That's enough for me. Getting out of the house was. Yeah, that's it. And my brother use to play board games with me. That was the best thing.

**Speaker 1** [00:15:11] Yeah. So to kind of not make it the center of everything, I guess, to kind of distract you time and time again is something that you enjoy.

**Speaker 2** [00:15:18] Until I started taking on. Until I came back to uni because I had the gap year. Yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:15:22] Yeah. So, speaking of that, I can't imagine going from graduating school to university. That's already such a big jump for a lot of people to go. It's a completely different environment. It's the courses are completely different. What you do in university as opposed to what you do in school. Is there anything now, I know you mentioned that your symptoms weren't as bad as they usually would be. Is there anything that you think the university could do or should have done for people who may have had symptoms that are worse than you?

**Speaker 2** [00:15:53] Okay. Now, as I mentioned, that the my symptoms weren't as bad, so I didn't really need that much help. But for other patients who do need help, maybe they could because, you know, with chemo, you need like you lose your focus earlier. Much easier for me, even like sometimes I still have my short-term memory that's, like, horrible. Yeah. So, it's much worse for other people, Sometimes some of them can't walk. They have so little energy. So, the university, if it ever overcomes more people like this, they should like give, you know, extra tutoring sessions to them. Actually, they should be more patient with them, especially with assessments. For an essay, they need to give them a deadline the teachers should approach them, like give them like personal sessions to help them understand, make sure everything's okay with them.

**Speaker 1** [00:16:46] And this kind of links into an episode that we did earlier, I think it was the first episode where we talked about failure and how not every teaching style works with every student, and obviously every student, whether they're sick or not, would have their own sort of preferences to learning and even barriers to learning. So, while some students can understand from just reading a presentation and taking notes, other students would prefer a more interactive, yeah, you know, learning environment and stuff like that. So obviously what Romeo said here was on point and I can't imagine like having to go through something this terrible and you know, the university not being as a core any educational facility, whether it's school or university or that, um, how long actually just this goes back to the beginning. I should have asked you this, but how long you said that you had a really bad headache and that was kind of a sign that maybe there was something wrong. Yeah. How long did that headache last approximately?

**Speaker 2** [00:17:38] You mean like until they found the tumor or.

**Speaker 1** [00:17:41] until you decided. Oh, I should probably go to the er for this.

**Speaker 2** [00:17:44] Oh. Because you know, it was actually I know what normal headaches feel like. They're like a normal headache, like this was like immense. And so like I took like two Panadol and it didn't go away. I took a ibuprofen, which was basically a stronger version of Panadol, and it still didn’t go and like we just had, we just decided to go then because like 3 Panadol and like within 2 hours and then not even decreased by a bit. So we're like, we need to go check, maybe there's something wrong.

**Speaker 1** [00:18:14] Okay, so obviously people mental illness doesn't really need a sort of a reason or a background story to it. It usually just happens out of nowhere. But when someone going through something super difficult, just like your Romeo would, how did you how do you feel like your mental health was impacted by all of this? Because like you mentioned, this this all kind of happened. All of the sudden, you mentioned that you were stressed and you were sort of, you know, feeling frustrated and angry after, you know, the surgery and after everything went well. How do you feel like your mental health and your mental state has shifted from how you were before to how you are now .

**Speaker 2** [00:18:53] What was this you asking for during chemo or even after finishing chemo?

**Speaker 1** [00:18:58] Both.

**Speaker 2** [00:18:59] Okay. I think I'll start with getting treatment. Yes. Okay. Um, well, because it's, you know, you're when you want to have a surgery and any such treatment, that's a lot to take in for a person. So, I was like, also so stressed, you know, even if my side effects weren't as much as compared to other patients, it's still a lot. And like, I had like a bundled up a lot of anger inside of me and like, sometimes like I would get angry or like sometimes a few moments I would explode to people who had like no relation with what I have been through. And I don't mean do that. Like sometimes I just bundle up so much and like, the smallest thing sets me off. Yeah, to be honest. Like, yeah. So I was like sort of during treatment, I get angry quickly. I was like, oh, like 24 seven. I was on the verge of just like being emotionally, like, unsettled, but like, like maybe it would also be like, I thought I had many friends with me in school. And like only a few of them would stay, like, keep on checking on me and the others would be like they would have known about it and they hadn't even checking on me. So, I guess that's what I did to my anger. So like, like doesn't like, do they not even care what I've been through? But, like, thinking what? Like after I've done finished, now I think I've come down a bit like I'm, I'm a much more of a calm person, but I feel like the anger is just faded out.

**Speaker 1** [00:20:27] Yeah. So, do you think a large portion of the anger came from the chemotherapy, or do you think that it was just your state of mind at that time?

**Speaker 2** [00:20:36] I think it was my state of mind at the time, like because of getting angry very quickly because like, I was still maybe in shock. Even after it was a few months, I was still in shock after what happened. Like, I can't believe this is happening to me. And everything

**Speaker 1** [00:20:50] Correct me if I'm wrong, but there's still a risk of it. When you're doing chemotherapy, there's still a risk of there being bad news that, oh, it's come back or oh, it's actually not getting better is.

**Speaker 2** [00:20:59] Now after I did the before I after the surgery they did on the scan and they were like, we don't see any cancer anymore, but we're just going to do chemo and radiation just in case.

**Speaker 1** [00:21:10] To be on the safe side.

**Speaker 2** [00:21:10] The so like during chemo, chemo kills cancer anyway. Yeah. So, during the chemo, there's like, no chance of it coming back. And so, like, I did a scan right after I finished it, they said, there's nothing, so you're free to go. But like, obviously in the future, you know, it's cancer. There's always a chance of it coming back in the future. You know, like during that period of chemo and like, there was like no chance. Yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:21:33] I first of all, want to thank you for being on this episode. I'm so excited that we got to do an episode with somebody who has such a special story. Now, is there anything that you want people to take away from this episode or from your story? Is there anything that you want them to keep in mind when they're going through something difficult? Whether it's cancer or something just is as basic as a bad day?

**Speaker 2** [00:21:54] Yeah, actually, just like even though, as I mentioned, that maybe I was I wasn't I was very emotionally like, unsettled. I was still I still had faith that you're supposed to be positive. I guess that's why that's why I like it. Was that all my scans were good. I just have a feeling like I was always like. Like part of me was always so positive that there was nothing in me. I just. I just had put my faith in God and everything. And I stayed positive and like, you know, just that's how it's going to be for me. Whatever is going to happen, I'm doing what I can.

**Speaker 1** [00:22:29] Absolutely. I think you kind of acknowledge that things are out of your control, and you can do the best you can. And it is very can I just say you are very strong to just stay positive during these times because again, it's probably one of the most difficult things a human being can go through, the scariest things. So, the fact that you were able to stay positive and stay strong and stay, you know, and even after you've gone through all the difficult stuff, you still want to come back and talk about it and tell people about it and, you know, kind of spread that light. Because while you were able to stay positive, some people maybe you were not as fortunate or not, don't have that same mindset.

**Speaker 2** [00:23:03] Because most people, they're not they're not very comfortable talking about their story. And I understand that. But like, I just my goal is just to, like, help people, like whatever you're going through to stay positive. That's my, that's my, like, goal.

**Speaker 1** [00:23:19] Yeah. And like you said earlier in the episode, you know, you had friends, friends and family to kind of distract him from, you know, the terrible stuff that was happening, you know, board games going on, walks, stuff like that. And that's really like, you know, it's even it can make anyone's day even a little bit better. So, I hope you guys enjoy this episode. I hope you took away something great from it. I know I did. Romeo, thanks again for being on the episode. I'm so glad that you asked to be on this episode.

**Speaker 2** [00:23:48] and thank you for having me.

**Speaker 1** [00:23:48] Oh, it was a pleasure. Now, as you guys know, if you have any topics you want to suggest or you want to hear more about on this podcast, you can email wellbeing@ AFGE-Aberdeen.edu.qa. Thank you for listening and yeah, have an awesome day everybody.