Young couple raise over $20K for Synovial Sarcoma research ahead of NATIONAL SARCOMA AWARENESS MONTH

The "Ultimate" restyle: Max Qua has not had a haircut since 2015 – this weekend she is shaving it off for synovial sarcoma research!

Max Qua is a high achieving young Western Australian woman with a very good reason to brave the shave – to raise much needed funds for research into Sarcoma – an extremely rare cancer that represents just 1% of all known cancers. Her partner, Matthew Eton, is battling synovial sarcoma - a subtype of this rare cancer – for the second time in just five years.

With Matt is due to lose his hair again, Max Qua, 24, thought she would do the same. The pair created a Facebook fundraising page last week - Max and Matt go Bald for Sarcoma Research – and have to date raised over $18K for local charity Sock it to Sarcoma.

Her dead straight, waist long uncoloured jet-black hair has not been cut for over five years, and with her ponytail likely to measure in at well over 40cm, it is highly valued by wig makers.

Matt, 23, was first diagnosed with Synovial Sarcoma at just 18 years of age. Now after five years of clear scans, the cancer is back.

"Back in the first half of 2015, I underwent surgery, followed by four months of chemotherapy and three months of radiotherapy - all during my second year of uni," said Matt, who continued to study towards his electrical engineering and business law degree at the University of Western Australia (UWA) during treatment.

However, raising money and awareness for cancer charities is nothing new for Matthew.

In 2015 he entered Run for Reason and managed to complete 5km while undergoing chemo. He was a volunteer organiser for the Cancer Council Relay for Life on campus at UWA. As he completed his degree, he turned his attention to a topic for his honours thesis that could make a difference and focused on medical imaging – specifically analysing breast cancer imaging techniques for use during surgery. He even worked as a research assistant with the breast cancer imaging group for the second half of 2018.

He finished his studies, earning a Bachelor of Philosophy with First Class Honours. He was also one of the University of Western Australia top prize winners in 2018 – being awarded the prestigious Dr Vincent Harry Cooper Memorial Prize for his honours dissertation on Sub-surface Feature Characterisation Using Simulated Optical Palpation and completed his honours in biomedical engineering.

Matthew spent six months working as a researcher with BRITElab at the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research and currently works with Azure Consulting in Perth, who are being very understanding and supportive as he battles Synovial Sarcoma for a second time.

A medical researcher herself, Max knows all too well just how needed targeted research funding is. Her Master of Biomedical Science included a thesis focusing on HIV and immunogenetics, and she is currently studying towards her Doctorate in Epidemiology.

"We aimed high and thought we could raise around $5,000," said Max, noting that both she and Matt will be shaving their heads. That initial target was soon exceeded in a few hours, and within just one day they had raised over $13K. As of this morning, they have raised over $20K.

"I'd like to think we could raise $30k – it's a year's salary for a PhD scholarship," said Max.
"When Matt was diagnosed just over a month ago, I did a big trawl through all the scientific literature I could find about this particular type of cancer. I realised that relative to many other cancers and medical conditions, the science of sarcoma is not too well understood, with comparatively limited research. There are gaps that need to be filled, and a scarcity of funding available to fill them.

"We are both pretty fit, so when Matt was suddenly experiencing abdominal pain and turned very pale, we suspected that something was not right," said Max, who happens to be one of Australia’s top Ultimate athletes – in fact she is a former Australian Beach Ultimate Team Captain and currently represents Australia as the ambassador for the Academy International University Sports Federation (FISU).

Matt was admitted to hospital with internal bleeding from a tumour 17 May 2020 and has spent four weeks in hospital. He started chemotherapy again last week and is undergoing his second dose today.

This dedicated young pair have a real battle on their hands, but they are strong and are bravely facing this next challenge together – they are ready to Sock it to Sarcoma!

Matt is fortunate to have such a strong support network with Max, his friends and family, and behind them the team at Sock it to Sarcoma who have helped his family over the past five years. His mum, Jane, even arranged a loan of a pair of hair clippers from a hairdressing friend – suspecting that Matt’s beard trimmer may not be able to handle the sheer amount of hair that Max is about to remove!

"I’ve never really believed in getting haircuts," said Max, whose hair is currently extremely long and usually tied in a high twist.

"We’ve added a quiz to our Facebook fundraiser to see if anyone can guess how much five years’ worth of hair might weigh," said Max, noting that as they are both top level Ultimate Frisbee players, the prize is a disc signed by both Max and Matt.

"I am still working out what to do with the hair. I can donate it, but I am aware that really long donated ponytails are often on-sold, so we are hoping an honest local wig maker can offer us a fair price and that money can further bolster our fundraising efforts," said Max.

It’s all coming off tomorrow – on Saturday 27 June – just ahead of Sarcoma Awareness Week & Sarcoma Awareness Month – both of which commence next week.

Due to social distancing, and as Matt will be immuno-compromised due to his treatment, the pair plan to livestream Matt shaving Max’s head at 1pm Perth time. Donations will continue through until 8 July 2020.

To donate, visit: Max and Matt go bald for Sarcoma research at: https://www.facebook.com/donate/260301718537415/264065344827719/

Contacts
Susan Hando
0411 711 351
mailto: susan@practicaltactical.com.au