Deborah Hough: My Story " Voice Challenges".

I had my oesophagectomy in 2016. Like everybody else, straight after surgery, I didn't know what had hit me, and wasn't too surprised that my voice had diminished to not much more than a whisper.

As the weeks went by, the volume did not return. It transpired that there might have been some cancer cells in the lymph nodes in my throat, and while I was under general anaesthetic seemed a good time to explore and eradicate them, if necessary, but unfortunately some damage had occurred with my vocal cords. I was advised to give it a year, and with all the other dietary changes to deal with, it wasn't at the top of my list anyway. But 2 years passed, and it started to be a bit of a nuisance. Apart from the family, I couldn't make myself heard in shops, or sometimes over the phone, and it was getting me down.

In 2019, I was referred to a Voice Clinic, and given exercises for my voice, but they made little difference. I was then refereed to a Consultant at the John Radcliffe, who organised an endoscopy. She explained that my left vocal cord had been paralysed during the surgery – though importantly nothing to do with the oesophagectomy. The treatment would be to inject the left vocal cord with filler, to make it swell. The right vocal cord would then have less distance to travel when it vibrated to meet the left and create the sound that was my voice. The treatment would be delivered as an outpatient appointment either from the neck in (a temporary procedure that I would repeat every couple of years) or down the throat, which would be more lasting.

I was really quite nervous about it but met a fellow patient at an OOSO summer lunch, who had had similar treatment and reassured me it would be fine. So, I committed, and in 2020 had the corrective treatment. My throat was very sore for a few days, but within a couple of weeks, my voice was back at normal volume, and has been fine ever since - tribute to our great Consultants at Oxford, and the value of our OOSO community.