

REMISSION RETIREMENT

Health teacher retires after fighting B-cell non-Hodgkin's lymphoma

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After about six months of fighting large B-Cell non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, health teacher Don Durkin announced he is in remission and retiring.

Durkin found out about the cancer in March and underwent eight rounds of chemotherapy called R-CHOP.

"It takes all day long, so I'd go one day every three weeks, and all day long they would give me these drugs," Durkin said. "I wouldn't have any energy. I'd just sit in my chair at home, and I couldn't even watch TV. I'd just sit there."

Durkin said that he and his wife felt completely supported by Lawrence High's community during his treatment. Faculty brought meals and gave financial donations to his family, and T-shirts were made in Durkin's honor for the volleyball team to wear.

"That's one great thing about Lawrence High School, they all help out and come around when somebody needs it," Durkin said. "The school district's been great. I've used up all of my sick days, so I use from what they call a pool of teachers that have given days to people that were sick... They took care of everything."

Durkin's absence has been, and will continue to be felt by many at school. He is known for his positivity, humor and kindness.

"He's a motivator, and he has a great sense of humor, and so he always sort of

helped me look at the positive even in some of the really long weeks," biology teacher Ann Foster said. "[I miss] hearing his voice, seeing him smile, his caramel corn and his humor."

Freshman in health classes also have appreciated these characteristics as they navigate their first year at Lawrence High. Among the things he was known for was having freshmen write letters to themselves that he then handed back to them in the final days of their senior years.

"[He's] very funny and genuine because he's just so lighthearted and doesn't take anything too serious," sophomore Daniellia Rivera said. "He's one of the greatest teachers. He's so nice and funny, like I think everybody needs that as a class and him as a teacher, because he's great."

On Sept. 26, Durkin learned that he is officially in remission.

"That's good, it's all gone for right now," he said. "They were concerned with some spots in my chest, or in my stomach, my abdomen, earlier this week and they took some biopsies and found out that they were OK."

This news was well received at Lawrence High. Durkin shared his plans to retire in a school-wide email after announcing he was in remission.

"I'm really glad and hope that he gets better because I want him to come back so that my little brother and my little brothers will have him as a teacher,"

Rivera said, before Durkin announced his retirement.

Durkin said he would miss teaching health and being around students.

"I miss all my kids," he said. "I always feel they're not just, you know, parents' kids, they're my kids too when they come to my classroom. I want to help them, and I miss being with them, and I miss the activities... that they're involved with and seeing everybody in the hall."

Durkin's experience fighting cancer has reiterated an already important quality in his life: kindness.

"I think [cancer's] made me realize that I'm vulnerable but also that if you don't give up you can conquer anything or you can succeed," he said. "I always like to see everybody take care of each other, and not just me as I'm sick, but your friends and take care of everybody else because there's a lot of people that hurt sometimes and have problems."

Lawrence High, he said, already possesses these characteristics, and did even when Durkin was first at the school in the '90s. He returned to LHS in 2011.

"I always knew Lawrence High was a special place, and I knew there was only one place I'd want to go back to when I went back into teaching," he said. "That would be Lawrence High because of how close the people are and how supportive they are of each other and how they take care of each other."

QUICK TAKE

Source: Durkin and cancer.net



6 months

Duration of Don Durkin's cancer fight



8

Rounds of chemotherapy Durkin went through



2011

Year Durkin returned to Lawrence High



3

Sports Durkin has coached at Lawrence High: wrestling, track and football



74,200

People diagnosed with non-Hodgkins lymphoma in 2018



GRAPHIC BY SAMI TURNER