"A blood test saved my life more than once" says Sunshine Coast dad

BUDERIM: Father of two Jason Matthews says blood tests saved his life as they diagnosed hypothyroidism, a serious infection and a superbug for him in the same year.

Wednesday 16th November is International Pathology Day and Jason describes pathology professionals as the "unsung heroes of healthcare".

Jason was first diagnosed with hypothyroidism in 2015, if left untreated it can cause kidney problems and increase cardiovascular risk.

Jason said: "Last year I started to feel really tired and run down – and I'd been putting on some weight around my face. Initially I just put it down to getting older. But it went on for months and eventually I knew I had to see a doctor. I'd get home from work and be passed out on the couch within fifteen minutes."

Jason was sent for blood tests but his doctor's diagnosis of Hypothyroidism was the last thing he expected; "I thought it was something only women suffered from."

Hypothyroidism affects around 5% of Australians. The thyroid gland secretes hormones to regulate the metabolism but in hypothyroidism it fails to secrete enough hormones into the bloodstream causing the metabolism to slow down – hence Jason's lack of energy and weight gain.

Although the condition is more prevalent amongst women, affecting up to 10% of Australian women, it affects men too.

"I think men think it's not 'macho' to go to a doctor," said Jason who is concerned that this could put men at risk of leaving the condition undiagnosed, and untreated, for longer.

Jason was prescribed medication and was instructed to have regular blood tests to monitor his thyroid function.

Jason also experienced further health problems needing pathology tests. He had been diagnosed with Irritable Bowel Syndrome years earlier but doctors now believe that this may have been the cause of a diverticular upset that put Jason in hospital just months after his hypothyroidism diagnosis.

"I thought I was coming down with the flu. It came on suddenly one night – I was shivering and had convulsions. I felt really cold so took a hot shower and went to bed. The next morning though I felt awful. I went back to the doctor, who assessed my symptoms and sent me for some urgent blood tests. The tests confirmed I'd developed sepsis from an infection and I was sent straight to hospital for treatment."

Jason underwent numerous blood tests in hospital to find the correct antibiotics and monitor his health – as well as to diagnose and treat VRE – a superbug he caught as an inpatient.

2016 has been a healthier year for Jason but he'll always be grateful for pathology services;

"A blood test saved my life on more than one occasion last year. We take it for granted that there are these people devoting their lives to treating us in pathology labs, but they don't get enough credit. They're really the unsung heroes of the healthcare system."

Pathology Awareness Australia (PAA) has launched Know Pathology Know Healthcare – an initiative aimed at demystifying pathology testing for the general public and increasing understanding of pathology's role in diagnosis and treatment.

PAA Ambassador Dr Peter Harman said: "Pathology test results are used for 70% of medical decisions and tests are vital throughout the healthcare system, and throughout our lives. About 50% of the population will have had a test in the last 12 months."

Visitors to www.knowpathology.com.au can read real-life stories about how pathology saves lives as well as search for information about blood and tissue tests in plain English using the Lab Tests Online database. The content is written by Australian pathologists and is government funded so patients can trust it is accurate and unbiased.

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Jason Matthews is available for interview

About Pathology Awareness Australia
Pathology Awareness Australia manages the Know Pathology Know Healthcare initiative (www.knowpathology.com.au). It is a not-for-profit company formed to improve understanding and recognition of Australia's world class pathology services. The company represents 95% of the Australian pathology landscape and comprises the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, private pathology groups, public pathology groups, and manufacturers and suppliers to industry.