"Why didn’t they tell us the truth?"

Admitting our mistakes is part of what defines us as mature and trustworthy human beings. Medical professionals have an even greater responsibility to be truthful – and damaging – if this trust is betrayed.

Joseph is a soft-spoken accountant. We are on the phone, and he is telling me about his shock at discovering for how long doctors had hidden the truth about his wife’s cancer diagnosis.

When his wife, Rose, was diagnosed late last year, the tumour was already large. “I was so shocked. I asked the oncologist: ‘Please tell me this hasn’t just come out of nowhere,’” Joseph remembers.

Rose was put on an aggressive treatment regimen, culminating in a session of high-strength radiotherapy just a week before her death.

Still traumatised by the speed of events and the suffering of his beloved wife, the last person Joseph expected to hear from two weeks after Rose’s passing was their family doctor. “She told me that the size of the tumour, and the speed of Rose’s death, did not make sense. She wanted me to get Rose’s notes from the hospital,” says Joseph.

The notes showed that a small tumour was visible in a scan taken more than a year before, when Rose had been admitted with pain. The radiologist on duty, who had been working a 16-hour shift, had missed the tumour.

“It’s devastating enough to think that Rose’s life could have been saved,” says Joseph. “But every oncologist and specialist who looked at the notes would have seen that scan and known that the cancer had been there for more than a year. Why did no-one say anything to us?”

Perhaps they were afraid of your anger, or that you would sue them, I venture.

“But Rose was not like that; she was strong and kind. She would have understood that mistakes can happen, and she would have accepted this; she would have accepted that the cancer had gone too far.

“I’m not saying it would have been easy for her,” he sighs,