

No one is unchanged by a close experience of cancer

Published: January 13, 2026, 12:57 am

I know quite a lot about having a spouse with cancer whilst also caring for a young family. I have been there and done that, and would very much rather not have the T-shirt.

The reason for making this point is, I am sure, obvious .

Let me, however, make another point. This is that we now know that the Royal family is intensely vulnerable at this moment. The king has cancer. The wife of his heir has cancer. The third in line to the throne is a child. All are going to be intensely distracted by the family issues that they face, and rightly so. Meanwhile, the only available person really able to help is effectively exiled in California. The rest inspire little confidence.

It is being said at this moment that we should stop discussing this family's health issues. I am happy to do so. But it is impossible to ignore the fact that the burden of being both the Royal Family, with massive constitutional responsibilities, and being a family with massive health issues and all the resulting strains to manage, is happening to these people in real time.

There are three entirely fair questions to ask.

The first is whether it is in any way fair to place this burden on any family now?

The second is to ask whether the constitution can survive as it is when it is so dependent on the continual availability of people who are, when all is said and done, only human, which fact we seem far too inclined to ignore.

Third, what are the consequences of wondering whether these strains are intolerable, which the death of the Queen, who somehow seemed to manage them, has exposed?

This is the moment to ask whether the intolerable demands being made on these people (because that is what, in both cases, they are) should be changed.

Any decisions will take time. Hopefully, those now suffering ill health will be better by

then. But no one forgets having cancer. No family that has lived through, is unmarked by it, even if those involved recover. And nothing is the same again. It is wholly appropriate to say that, and to ask what can really be done to make the lives of all involved more tolerable in the future. Isn't that precisely the right thing to do now?