

Dear Gillian,

I am writing to tell you about the way I was told I have MS.

A bit about me first - I am 34, live in Edinburgh and work in research. My friends and family know I have MS, but my employers and colleagues don't (yet - I have moved jobs since diagnosis and it's not the sort of thing you announce on your first day). So far, I've been lucky in that MS hasn't really affected what I can do day-to-day, although it's obviously something that is always in the background.

I had my first episode aged 21, during my third year at University - a period of double vision which was terrifying and for a long time no one could tell me what had caused it. I had an MRI, but by the time I received the scan results the double vision had cleared up. I have only vague memories of the explanation of the scan, but remember the consultant said that while it was 'probably a virus' I needed to come back if anything else happened over the next five years because there was 'a one in five chance it is MS'.

Nothing else happened until almost ten years later, when I had an episode of optic neuritis aged 30. I saw the term optic neuritis on a referral note from the eye hospital; as soon as I googled it I was fairly sure I had MS. The neuro-ophthalmologist explained that this was indeed a possibility, but that since MS is on a scale, even one more minor episode might lead to a diagnosis and then I may never have any other symptoms. At that point I was pretty sure it was MS but was hoping it wasn't - mostly, I was waiting for the next 'thing' to happen.

Six months later, I experienced numbness down one side of my face so returned to the GP who referred me to a neurologist. This whole process was extremely stressful, as I discovered from another GP at the practice that the referral had been marked 'urgent' (I was never told that at the time). The second GP was much more brash in his bedside manner, announcing that 'it could be a serious neurological condition' and taking steps to get me seen at the hospital as soon as possible.

Upon arriving at the hospital for my appointment at the Department of Clinical Neurosciences, I followed the directions on the letter and found myself in a waiting room with a sign up saying 'MS Clinic'. Not the best way to find out why I was there! The appointment itself was actually fine - the consultant spent an hour with me and explained everything really clearly; she gave me lots of

information and contact details for the MS nurses, who have always been great at answering queries quickly and seeing me if I needed it.

I've had brilliant care from the MS clinic since I was diagnosed (which is now almost four years ago), with regular reviews and an accessible team available if I need advice. Luckily I've not had another serious relapse since - touch wood - although it's obviously something that is always at the back (if not the front...) of my mind.

Anyway, that's my diagnosis story. I hope it helps!

Ruth