

Hyperthyroidism and me

I am writing this because someone out there is going through exactly what I am; they have an undiagnosed overactive thyroid. I hope by telling what happened to me it will also help someone else.

Journalists usually do not write about themselves, but in this case I have to break that unwritten rule.

This photo was taken last Friday - 6 months after the op.

Half a year on and going strong

Six months! Gosh I can hardly believe it has been so long since I was led into a room, had a cannula inserted and drifted slowly off to sleep.

Just to recap, for anyone not having browsed blogs 1 to 8, I descended into Graves Disease in June 2015, which is when the first half-stone of weight tumbled off me. I then waited while I shed another stone and a half, endured hot flushes and night sweats and my periods took a hike before finally I went to see my GP in early January 2016.

Why wait so long? Well, I am a woman of a 'certain age' and am knocking on the door of the menopause, so what else would I think it was?

Timetable

- Diagnosis – January 2016
- Proper medication – March 2016
- Acceptance that surgery was the only answer – December 2016
- Theatre (and not to watch a play) – April 11 2017

So it has been a long journey indeed.

Today is October 11 making it six months since the op and a lot has happened since then.

A day after the op while I was still in Fairfield General, doctors put a camera up my nostril and down the back of my throat because I had complained that 'this is not my voice'. They discovered my left vocal cord was not moving. My discharge sheet stated rather worryingly 'left vocal cord palsy'.

Just 11 days after the operation, I carried out my first job, an interview with a lovely lad who was starring in the touring show of Billy Elliot; I had been waiting to interview him for ages and as

he only got one week at home out of four at home I couldn't miss the opportunity.

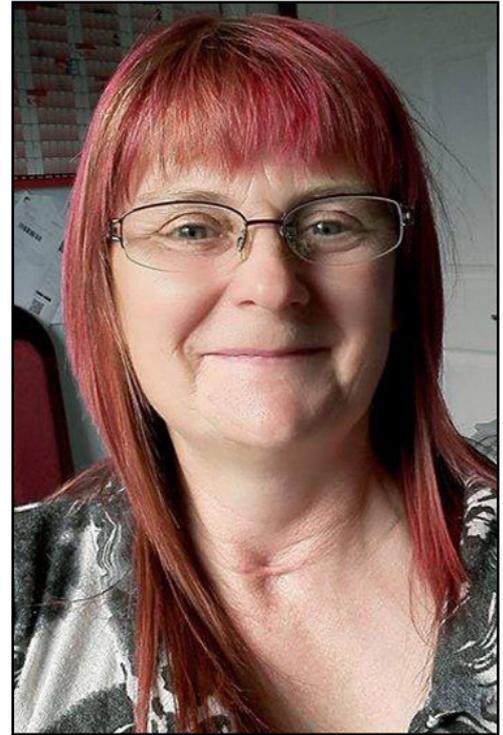
With a gruff voice, but full neck movement so I was legally insured to drive, I went to see his family in Haslingden. It was not easy, not being able to talk properly and I drank loads of water to ease my angry throat, but I even managed to raise a few smiles and kept the interview as light hearted as I could. The story made an amazing four-page feature in Lancashire Life, so it was worth it.

The following week I was back to work in earnest. A newsletter to write and produce, all three high schools to attend and a news item to write for one of my many ad hoc clients. Ok some may think that was stupid but anyone who really knows me will know that I cope with life's dramas by working my way through them. However, I did make sure I had a scarf around my neck at all time in public though.

I also started two afterschool clubs in May at primary schools, this was not the easiest of tasks for someone with a limited voice and no projection, but when you are self-employed what are you supposed to do?

I had a post-op follow-up appointment on May 4 at Fairfield General Hospital and another nasendoscopy, to use the proper terminology, was carried out. The letter I received said I had 'total left vocal cord palsy' and at it was hinted that, if there was no improvement, I may be offered a further operation.

In May I had also agreed to host a work experience student. Tanita had been a member of the Fearn's Chat team in



2016 and enjoyed writing so wanted to work with a journalist. Although my voice was still weak, I agreed to take her on and made sure the week was busy. She turned out to be a godsend and has volunteered her time to help my business ever since.

On June 5 I was reassessed by my surgeon Mr Shepherd and still the cord was not moving, no talk of operations this time, but I was referred to speech and language therapy.

Problems with food digestion, especially reflux and burping after eating, added another tablet from my GP to my daily collection and another visit to my endocrinologist reduced the level of thyroxine that I was taking. After no progress was made to accommodate me at a reasonable location within Pennine Acute Hospitals' premises for speech and language therapy, my GP referred me to East Lancashire Hospitals.

Meanwhile the busy journalist's work just kept on coming in. Fearn's Chat week was, as ever, at the end of June, this is the week when I produce a 16-page newspaper written by pupils in just a week, but the start was delayed – for a very good reason. The 2016 paper was named as a finalist in the 'community initiative of the year' in the national Shine Media Awards.

With three pupils and the head, I

enjoyed a busy day in London and was delighted when the pupils went on stage to collect the runner-up award. Back down to earth on Tuesday when I started the 2017 Fearn's Chat paper.

On August 4 I got my first appointment with speech and language therapist Beth at the Royal Blackburn Hospital and she gave me a list of 'to dos' so that I could help improve my voice and I did at least some of the exercises all of the time. She also got my GP to add Gaviscon to my ever growing prescription list. That certainly helped.

She booked me in for a 'video swallow' later that month which involved me ingesting a variety of dried food and liquids of different consistencies all with added barium. While I swallowed the action was videoed, this was a most unusual experience, but it did show that there were no issues with swallowing, the problem lay with digestion.

An amazing week-long break with my good friend Rachel at the end of the summer recharged my batteries and a couple of days later in September I was back to face Mr Shepherd, my surgeon.

This time before he inserted the dreaded camera, he used a spray to slightly numb my nostril and after 10 minutes I could actually breathe clearly through my nose. During the day time;

that never happens. It was also my birthday and for once I was to receive a present and some good news. The vocal cord now had some movement and so I was discharged from his care.

A follow-up appointment with Beth from the speech and language department also showed a marked improvement. In fact she remarked, 'You are not the same person that came in her in August.' I explained a good holiday had made all the difference.

I still have issues with my voice and if I use it for too long or I have to raise the level too much then I know it the following day. I still do my vocal cord exercises but often these are in the car so if you see a mad woman pulling funny faces behind the wheel then it is probably me!

I am heaps better. I feel much better, even though I still have problems sleeping. I still run around at 100 miles an hour with a head full of everything, however you can't change everything about a person's character. I am still on blood tests because my free T3, T4 and TSH levels need to be monitored. But the hacking cough has gone, the feeling of constant exhaustion has gone, the shaking hands are but a distant memory and my determination to manage this thing to the best of my ability is

paramount and stronger than ever.

My health has improved dramatically, although I do not wish to put on any more weight because I have had to buy new clothes. However I think my wardrobe was well overdue a bit of sprucing up and a revamp. My hair is currently pink as you can tell by the photograph, but it is no longer falling out all the time and I like being different.

The optimist is definitely back.

Addendum

Something some of you reading this may not realise is that when you have Graves Disease for whatever reason you have contracted it – be it genetic or stress related, as in my case – you have it for life. I may have banished the thyroid and replaced the damaged organ with Levothyroxine but I shall never be rid of Graves Disease.

One of the most heart-warming aspects to writing this blog is that it has helped the parent of a student at a high school be fully prepared to face the operation she needed and I wish her all the best with her recovery.

Thank you for taking the time to read my ramblings and I wish you all the very best of health x



May 2015

Pics Liz Henson Photography



March 2016



June 2016
the enlarged thyroid is clearly visible



March 2017
a month before the op