CASE STUDY

PAIN SUFFERER AND SENIOR TRAINER,
NHS EXPERT PATIENT’S PROGRAMME

About ten years ago, a couple of discs in my lower back prolapsed. As I now know, this was the result of years of misusing my body. I used to be a painter & decorator, and driving instructor and like so many of us, when I experienced pain I simply took painkillers.

I woke up one morning, however, after a long day’s work the previous day, to find that I could not walk properly or even go to the toilet. Panic set in; I had not experienced such severe pain before. I saw my GP and he prescribed painkillers and anti-inflammatories. When these didn’t work, he sent me for an X-ray, which didn’t reveal any major pathology. In the meantime, I also saw various osteopaths/physiotherapists and spent £8,000 seeking a cure.

Orthopaedic consultants told me my back problem was not serious enough to merit an operation and a consultant told me to learn to live with the pain. To be told that at the age of 39 I’d have to learn ‘to live with it’ came as a shock, especially when I had sciatic pain going up and down my leg at the time, and I walked with a limp. I then came across the National Back Pain Association.

At one of our meetings we had a session with a representative from the INPUT Pain Management Programme (PMP), St. Thomas’ Hospital, London. She talked to the group about learning multi-disciplinary skills to manage chronic pain. I then attended a two-week course which was designed to help everyone who has experienced chronic pain and this was the turning point in my recovery. The course organisers said that they could not make my pain go away completely, but they could help me to learn to manage it in a more effective way. Previously, I had subscribed to the old fashioned theory that pain management meant doing nothing and exercise would aggravate problems. The course convinced me that if I followed the simple pain management programme things would become much easier. They did.

Through a mixture of physiotherapy, occupational therapy, psychology, nursing and education these INPUT courses help sufferers understand their condition, how it is exacerbated and what they can do themselves to prevent and control the pain. Joining the programme has been my cure and only through specialists providing understanding, treatment and expertise have I been able to recover and live a normal life. Yes, I still get problems and flare-ups even today, but this is mainly due to me forgetting and not following the INPUT programme. Either, I have not paced myself sufficiently, or I have failed to set goals and not paced myself at all. The good thing is that these days I do have a first aid plan to fall back on if I run into problems.

I am now a Senior Trainer with the NHS Expert Patient Programme (EPP) and the lead EPP trainer in the UK for back pain self-management. My remit is to help people with all long-term conditions including pain, to self-manage their problems and help them to lead a healthier and happier life. As I see it, I help people find their way back from being a patient to regaining their life as a person.