

## Donna's story

I found out I was Hepatitis C positive about ten years ago when I was pregnant. I'd had no idea so it came as a real shock. I didn't really know I had it though; I had no symptoms and felt ok.

About a year ago I went for a routine appointment at my local hospital with the Hepatology nurse and had a fibroscan. It was then I found out that my liver disease had got worse and I was now cirrhotic. The doctor came to see me and explained that I could have the new treatment earlier than we had planned as my disease had got worse.

I was so scared. I'd heard such terrible things about treatment, like I wouldn't be able to get out of bed, or look after the kids; it would go on for a year and I would lose all my hair. I'd talked to my partner and we'd agreed before to put treatment off until the kids were older.

The progression of my liver disease had to change all of that. My nurse explained that these new treatments weren't like the ones I'd heard about, she couldn't say they'd be no side-effects but it was nothing like before. I decided to go ahead with treatment.

I started in April 2016. I took a treatment called Harvoni with ribavirin. To begin with everything was fine; I felt fine and carried on as normal. Then I developed pneumonia and ended up in hospital for 9 days. The medical team did think about stopping treatment but my viral load was dropping so it was working and, as at the moment you cannot have more than one course of treatment, they decided it was best to carry on. After that I got better, I had a few problems with feeling moody and tearful and had a couple of rages. I think I was quite run down so got cold after cold which really didn't help.

My nurse was great through all of this; she really worked with me to help me get through everything.

At the end of treatment and 12 weeks post treatment the virus was undetectable and still is so I'm delighted. I have one more blood test to go.

I am now pleased I went ahead with the treatment, I would recommend it to anyone thinking about it, even though I was poorly.

I care passionately about supporting people with Hep C. I am working with a local drug treatment centre to try to set up a patient support group, and have joined the patient engagement group who are working with the NHS locally to improve access to care for patients with Hep C. I would really like to create a patient buddy scheme for people thinking about treatment so there is always access to advice from someone who has actually been there.