13 August 2015: Madness Begins

August 13, 2015 By David Pieper

It's the night before I start my hep C treatment and I can't settle. At home I have been sorting out my life and mentally preparing for weeks. And now I'm still at work trying to get everything sorted at my desk and in my mind, as though I am preparing for the onset of madness or death. Hopefully neither of these will happen, but because I have been at this point twice before, I am acutely aware of my reaction to treatment. In my first round of treatment I was working for the Ambulance Service. I was dealing with people having the worst day of their lives, while in the back of my mind I was thinking "You think you've got problems". It wasn't long before the thought was verbalised and I told someone to "Go to hell". Needless to say I was suspended from duty.

During my second round of treatment, nine months later, I yelled abuse at one of my work colleagues and stormed out of the office. My boss phoned me and told me not to come back. Not one of my career highlights. But that was interferon based treatment and my behaviour was what is euphemistically described as "mood swings" in the catalogue of treatment-related side effects.

Looking back on it, it was a kind of madness; a madness where the internal filter that stops you saying exactly what you think all the time, is somehow removed. I think it comes from the single mindedness you need in approaching hepatitis C treatment. Nothing was going to get in my way then and nothing is going to stop me from clearing my hepatitis C this time. But it also reminds me that the words "side effect" don't really convey the unpleasant reality of experiencing a few of them simultaneously, and knowing that you need to, and will, continue taking the medication that is causing them.

By all accounts the all-oral, interferon-free treatment I am scheduled to start tomorrow, doesn't have this, or any of the other nasty side effects of interferon based treatment. I have spoken to a few people who have warned me about a bit of nausea, which can be overcome by making sure to take the tablets with a meal. But just in case my internal filter starts to slip, I have warned all my work colleagues, and my friends and family, not to take any notice of what I say over the next three months. Hopefully they don't see this as an excuse for me to let fly on a range of pent up grievances! I've had lots of hugs, both verbal and physical and I know there are people barracking for me. I really appreciate the support.

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