

What's Been Happening?

The Inspiring Personal Journey of a Member of GAVO Staff – Jules Horton

“When I was 27, after having a happy, fairly well off and comfortable life, my world changed; my husband walked out and left me and I was diagnosed with cancer and I was also told I could possibly die. Within the year, I lost my home, my health and every single thing I knew in my life.

Every single year from that day in 1999, I have had chemo, fractures or surgery. My immune system failed, my bones thinned, my ligaments are breaking and I gave up on life, as what was the point. I had given everything I had to fight the cancer, rebuild my life and still it was not enough. In 2008, I broke my back and this was literally the final straw for me; mentally and physically, I broke completely.

Being told I would never ride my horses again, never walk, drive, or work after everything I had been through, seemed the cruellest blow of all. How was I meant to manage to keep my home, my horses, and a disabled partner, when I was in hospital for months at a time all over again?

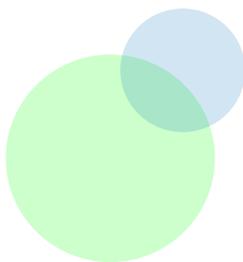
Life seemed impossible; I was a complete wreck, exhausted, defeated and broke in every sense of the word.

I was offered a place on an EPP course; this was a course designed to develop the skills to enable you to manage long-term health conditions. Initially, I thought ‘how on earth will they know how I feel?’, as I had always been trying to accept and deal with this on my own and to be honest, I had managed to survive this long!

I was totally wrong, I could not believe just how many people felt the way I did, although we all had different problems we were all going through very similar symptoms and managing very badly.”



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"I finally found the one thing I needed and that was to like 'me'! To own and befriend my condition and not let it take me over and constantly fight each other.

I got so much out of it and I felt that I had finally found the reason why I was chosen to get sick, it was so I could help others like me and to finally pay back the NHS as a volunteer tutor.

My life changed completely the first day I volunteered as a tutor, the sense of helping and achieving something actually overwhelmed me and it still does today.

Each course I gave, I grew in confidence and ability, I learnt to like me and started competing as a Para Dressage Rider; I have now won representing GB and have won three Home Internationals for Wales.

One of the biggest achievements of my life apart from surviving cancer and a chemo drug trial, has been being employed by GAVO as a Co-ordinator for EPP, running the courses that changed my life. I am now a 'Bevan Advocate' and I have also spoken at the Bevan Health Conference and Public Health Wales Conference and this April, I will be speaking at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's International Forum, in London.

My dream would be to continue to develop in my role with EPP and to do more promotional speaking, so others can learn to change their lives the way mine has and to also be able to speak as a motivational speaker because if one single person gets something from what I have been through then it was worth it.

This is all because I did a course that I thought was not for me!"

Written by Jules Horton, GAVO Education Programmes for Patients (EPP) Co-ordinator