

Karen Walker is a Community Services Pharmacy Technician working for Gloucestershire Care Services (GCS); working in the Medicines Management Team based at Edward Jenner Court. Her role involves supporting clinical teams managing medicines.

In March 2014 at the age of 45, she was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's Mediastinal High Grade B Cell Lymphoma; yes quite a mouthful so from here on in will be referred to as Lymphoma.

This type of Lymphoma affected the valves in her lungs and meant that both lungs (plural membrane) filled with fluid, the right lung being the worst. Karen had 2 chest drains inserted to the right side to re-inflate the lung and many aspirations to keep the fluid at bay.

Tell us what happened from Diagnosis?

I spent 8 weeks in hospital, on a cocktail of medication including chemotherapy whilst constantly on oxygen. My body was annoyingly broken. I had always been reasonably fit and healthy and I knew that once my treatment had finished I was going to return the person I was. Or was I? When my strength came back I took up Yoga, something I had previously sniffed at but Yoga practice was to be my saviour. It made me feel better both physically and emotionally. However, I needed more. I wanted to start running around so I took up badminton with my husband only to rupture my right Achilles whilst playing!!

I had a chronic repair, which took another 6 months before it became reasonably functional. From attending the local Lymphoma Support Group I got to hear of a circuits class at Cheltenham Ladies College run by Heidi's Hero's for people and their partners/carers who have been through or are going through cancer treatment. It is run by a personal trainer, and physio; our very own Clare Lait, (Macmillan Next Steps physio).

Attending these sessions really helped my confidence, particularly with recovering from the Achilles operation. It also gave me the thirst to want to do more. Remember when I said I wanted to go back to being the old me, well I lied, I wanted to be a new me. Stronger, fitter and happier than before and I knew that exercise was the key.

When did you hear about H8H?

In November 2016 I got to hear about Health 8 Hustle at GCS through Chantel Spence. I started out on the mid week mid day walk and it wasn't long before I purchased a Fitbit. Kevin and Chantel are so supportive and soon I was up to my 10k steps per day. Before I knew it they were encouraging me to go running. I have only attended one after work running session with Kev, but he was so

helpful with hints and tips on breathing and pacing, that he helped me to achieve my goal of completing this years Race for Life 5k. I ran the whole way, no stops, honest! The support of the H8H team gave me self-belief, and I can't thank them enough.

What's your next goals?

This year I have achieved a goal, which I didn't for see. After watching rugby for 42yrs, yes I am a frustrated Gloucester Rugby Fan, at the age of 48 I picked up a rugby ball and ran with it!! I have joined Bredon Ladies Touch Rugby Team and it is the best thing I have ever done. It is both enormous fun and totally shattering. The lovely thing is playing with my eldest daughter. I can honestly say that I have achieved my ambition of being stronger, fitter and happier than before.

I still do the Yoga and the Circuits but the benefits of playing a team sport, with a great supportive bunch of people is what truly gives me my kicks. I don't know if I have lost weight? My body shape has changed a bit but my life has changed the most.

I hope that my story shows that age is no barrier and that exercise and fitness are a good way to recover from health set backs. No matter how little you do, do something.