



My MS journey began at Easter 2022; luckily, I was staying with my parents in Gisborne for the holiday. I woke up one morning unable to speak normally – the wrong words were coming out when I tried to speak. When someone asked me a question, to which the answer was ‘no’ I would shake my head ‘no’ but say yes. My mum likened it to a toddler trying to talk.

Thinking I had had a stroke, my Mum asked my Dad to take me to the emergency department. Following a very brief chat with the doctor, I was sent for a CT scan. The results came back clear but the doctor told me that if I hadn’t improved in a week I would need to go to my GP and get an MRI. A week later my speech hadn’t improved, and may have worsened. My doctor referred me to the

neurology department for an MRI, but the request was denied on the basis that I was young and healthy, being only 26.

Fast forward to June or July and my speech hadn’t improved. My doctor referred me to a private neurologist. Unfortunately, I didn’t have insurance, so I had to pay out of pocket for it (with the help of my parents). Following an MRI, an x-ray on my chest and a lumbar puncture, it was clear that there were lesions on my brain. At this point, the Waikato DHB was interested and from here I was able to go through the public sector. Over the next few months, I was subjected to two more lumbar punctures (which were unsuccessful and hurt a lot), a fourth lumbar puncture, which was successful, and another MRI. On top of all of this, things at work were stressful; I had a very unsupportive boss, which made a job that I usually loved unbearable. It was at this point that I started to lose my eyesight, it gradually got worse to the point where it was as if I had a film over my eyes – I couldn’t see my TV or computer or read without holding the book to my nose. I was admitted to hospital the week of my 27th birthday in September, on which day I was officially diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis.

I cried a lot. My parents cried a lot. It honestly felt like my life was over. My thoughts were along the lines of *‘I’m going to end up in a wheelchair’* and *‘I’m never going to get married or have children’*. It was an awful time for me but I met Liz Hogan from MS Waikato and she assured me there was a light at the end of the tunnel. It’s been almost a year since my diagnosis and almost a year since I started on my monthly infusions of Tysabri (which seems to be working). With the support of Liz and Karen Bird (also from MS Waikato) I found a new job with a supportive boss, I have joined a weekly walking group with other MS clients and things seem to be looking up. I still have my moments of doubt and sadness but overall I have come a long way and I know that things will continue to get better.

Throughout my diagnosis and ongoing, Liz and Karen from MS Waikato have been pillars of support for me. They were invaluable sources of information when I was first diagnosed and

were able to support me at work meetings as I navigated a return to work. Attending the meetings alone would have been challenging for me and I have since had the confidence to change jobs. I'm in a new company, I disclosed my diagnosis during the interview process and I am enjoying the job and feel I am being treated really well. Even more exciting for me, my recent MR showed no new lesions and some shrinkage in existing ones in my spine!

Emma

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