

JASON'S TB STORY: 'A TERRIBLE DISEASE'

“When I woke up one night in November, with a severe headache, I thought nothing much of it. I took paracetamol.

Nothing seemed to get rid of the headache though and it was a bit annoying. Then suddenly the headache went. I felt a bit under the weather but nothing that I took seriously. Gradually, over the coming weeks, I started to feel cold, then hot, irritable, short-tempered and I starting to go off food (unusual for me).

Long-COVID?

Christmas came and I was getting worried. I didn't know what was going on. I built up the courage to ring my doctor. He sent me for blood tests and said return if my condition worsened. Two days later I was back. I was not eating, the thought of food made me sick, and I was losing weight. The doctor didn't know what was wrong as my blood tests came back normal apart from the COVID-19 antigen test which came back positive. I was told I probably had long-COVID, but I wasn't happy as the symptoms I was having didn't seem to match.

I mentioned that I had TB when I was 18 months old and the symptoms seemed very similar. The doctor rang the TB clinic for advice. The TB nurse told me to come into the clinic straight away where I was sent for an x-ray. When the consultant looked at it they said it didn't look like TB, but to be safe I was sent for a CT scan. This did show TB!



Acting strangely

I was admitted to hospital and given all sorts of tests. I was given medication and sent home on the fourth day. The following day I was visited by a TB nurse, to talk me through the medication. My wife told her that I was acting and walking strangely. The nurse asked me some simple questions then quickly referred me back to hospital – I was having a stroke!

This was early February. I had another two strokes and the doctors contacted my wife to say they didn't think I would make it. I was diagnosed with TB meningitis – TB of the brain or spinal cord. I was in hospital for a total of 12 weeks and I have no recollection of the first three.

It was hard. My whole family had to go through tests and the children had a vaccine. I couldn't see them because of the pandemic. My children thought I would die in hospital and that they would never see me again. My wife was amazing. She had just lost her dad, and we were moving house and also home schooling. Now she had the worry of losing me. She stayed strong for us all, I know how hard she had it.

I lost three and a half stone in weight and suffered muscle wastage. I was very weak and awfully tired. I had memory loss, speech difficulties and was frustrated about what had happened to me.

After a year of treatment, I am so grateful to my GP and all the TB specialists who treated me. But the biggest thank you goes to my wife who nursed me through this terrible disease.