

NHSBT Board Meeting

July 2018

Patient Story: Tears of Joy!



Dr Jo Daniels, 37, from Bristol needs serum eyedrops, made from blood donations, to enable her to see properly and be able to live a normal life.

Jo has the autoimmune disease Sjogrens Syndrome. This has caused her immune system to attack her own tear glands, stopping her making enough of her own tears and causing her eyes to dry out and become damaged. She initially developed symptoms of dry and prickly eyes, which then deteriorated, causing extremely painful micro ulcers on her corneas, and leaving her with blurred vision.

Jo said: "I couldn't drive for a long time and I had to wear a hat and sun glasses all of the time. I was isolated and a little depressed, having to stay in my house without even TV or reading to entertain me."

Various treatments, including very painful surgery on both eyes failed, and it was only when Jo was prescribed serum eyedrops (that she was able to get her life back).

Jo, a clinical psychologist and lecturer at the University of Bath, and a mum of three-year-old Oona, said: "I had got to the point where I couldn't see. I couldn't drive. I was off work for four months and I thought my career was over. It was really upsetting because my daughter was 18 months old and I was afraid I would not be able to see her grow up. If I didn't have the serum things would become awful again."

Some patients donate their own blood to make their serum eyedrops, while other patients are unable to donate blood for medical reasons, rely on the generosity of voluntary blood donors. Jo tried giving blood herself twice but due to poor veins and circulation problems associated with Raynaud's Syndrome, she was unable to continue donating her own blood.

Jo says: "I can only see because people donate blood that is used to extract serum that people like me put in their eyes hourly, all day long. I know people are aware that blood saves lives, literally saves lives but also without blood I wouldn't be able to see my children or live my life as I know it. It saves me terrible pain, vision and my emotional wellbeing."

She said the first time she used them she felt an immediate sense of cooling relief, and after around a week her eyes were feeling much better. Jo said: "My eyes will never feel normal again, but my vision started to return and I was able to drive and wear my sunglasses less."

Her husband Chris, a film festival organiser, was inspired to become a blood donor himself, to say thank you for the serum eyedrops Jo receives. NHSBT makes the serum for adult patients with blood donated by male A/AB donors at Liverpool static centre or Manchester Plymouth Grove. One donation makes around three months' worth of serum.

She added: "When I tell people about the serum made from blood donations, or they see me putting in the drops, perhaps in meetings, they find it absolutely fascinating, and a little odd. They find it difficult to make sense of it but are often amazed by the wonder of science - its extraordinary what medicine can do".

"I can't even describe how grateful I am to people who donate blood, for the impact this has had on my life and the lives of my husband and daughter, it is completely immeasurable."

Postscript: NHSBT's Serum Eyedrop service was recognised at the 2017 Patient Experience Network National Awards (PENNA). It was awarded first place in the 'Continuity of Care' category, and was runner up in the 'Bringing Patient Experience Closer to Home' and 'Using Insight for Improvement' (other NHS funded) categories.

