

**NHSBT Board
November 2023**

**Patient Story
More than 300 days in hospital but a life saved by plasma donation**

Introduction

NHS England's annual report says immunoglobulin is used to treat conditions in immunology, neurology, haematology, and infectious diseases. One of the main uses is for autoimmune disorders. Around 4,500 people in England receive immunoglobulin for an autoimmune disorder each year, including around 800 to 1,000 for Guillain–Barré syndrome (GBS). This is a very rare and serious condition where the body's immune system attacks the nerves. Early symptoms include numbness, pins and needles and muscle weakness, and it can rapidly progress to difficulty walking, swallowing and breathing. Immunoglobulin is a standard treatment in more serious cases. On average, each person with GBS treated by NHS England received a total volume of immunoglobulin made from around 50 to 60 plasma donations.

The patient case study

Mark, 58, a construction site manager from Cowplain near Waterlooville in Hampshire, was diagnosed with Guillain Barre syndrome in February 2022.

He went from feeling tingling in his hand when arriving at work in the morning, to losing his sense of balance, and by 8pm that night he was in Queen Alexandra Hospital in Portsmouth in a coma, paralysed from the nose down, with a ventilator to keep him breathing. Mark went on to spend more than 300 days in hospital – including seven months in ICU. During that time, another patient in the hospital died of Guillain Barre syndrome.

Mark said: "I was driving to work, which is only about 20 minutes away, and I was feeling a bit rough. I had some tingling in my hands and my legs started to feel weak at the knees. I just said 'something is not right' and I got somebody to drive me home and my wife took me to the hospital. By the time we got there, which is only 15 minutes away, I was just about able to walk and still just about able to carry my own weight, and I went downhill over the day."



Starting that night, he received five days of intravenous immunoglobulin treatment. The immunoglobulin contained donor antibodies, which helped his own immune system to regulate and reduced the attacks on his nervous system.

Mark said: "The immunoglobulin was absolutely lifesaving. I had one of the harshest strains of GBS - acute motor and sensory axonal neuropathy - if I hadn't had the immunoglobulin straight away I presume I would have got progressively worse and probably wouldn't have made it. I was a healthy working man and this came out of the blue. Without plasma donations, I don't think I would be here today."

Today, Mark can breathe on his own, and is trying to build his muscles back with exercise and physical therapy. He still has weak ankles and balance problems and his hands and feet are still not back to normal.

Mark's wife Suzi, 53, a former nursery nurse who is now Mark's carer, said: "He had to learn to speak, swallow and breathe again. For a long time in hospital he basically communicated with his eyes up and down for yes and no." She added: "I think plasma donors are heroes. They are going to save a lot of people's lives."

Reflections

NHSBT was not involved in the direct treatment of care of Mr Hobbs. His story reflects the national importance of immunoglobulin for treating conditions which are currently less familiar to NHSBT. There are also commissioning policies for the administration of immunoglobulin, which reflect the constrained international supply situation, and NHSBT can provide a more secure supply to the NHS by taking more plasma donations.

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