

## My MS Story

**Tercia Paulse** (May 2020)



Just over a year ago, life was going great. I was making plans to achieve certain personal goals for 2019, from my career to my personal life, and my health was 100%. I could not remember the last time I even had the flu. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think that 2019 would be the year to turn my world upside down.

On 2 April, my mum experienced an unexpected brain aneurysm which put her in a coma for almost 2 months and sadly, she passed away on 26 May. It came as quite a shock to have lost my mum so suddenly and it was quite a stressful period for my family and I. Towards the end of May, a few days before my mum's passing, I started experiencing the first set of symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis which included slurred speech, pain, numbness and tingling on my right side. A few weeks later, I experienced the symptoms on the left side of my body. At one point, my toes stopped moving and my foot would just drag on the floor whilst walking. This was when I really started to worry.

My GP in Durban had referred me for an MRI on my spinal cord as the pain and numbness initially started on my neck and radiated up and down the side of my body. The MRI detected lesions on my spinal cord and I was referred to a Neurologist as soon as possible for further investigation. I returned back home to Johannesburg the following week and visited Professor Modi. He sent me for additional tests including a brain MRI that showed lesions on my brain as well and I was diagnosed officially with Multiple Sclerosis on 4 July 2019. When Prof Modi informed me that I had MS, I was somewhat sad however, it didn't quite sink in at that moment as I had never really heard or known much about the disease. I just looked at him and said "okay, so what now?" with an awkward smile on my face trying to hold back the tears. In that moment, I really wished to have my mum there holding my hand, telling me that things were going to be alright. Prof Modi gave me the reassurance that everything was going to be fine and that he would explain everything in detail with the next steps to follow. He was really great and patient when explaining my diagnosis and told me that I can live a normal life with a few lifestyle changes and treatment.

It took me some time to adjust to everything once I got back home and was anxious to start treatment. I started my medication about 3 months later and since then I have tried to slowly adjust my lifestyle and personal life to accommodate my new normal. It can be a bit difficult to cut out the things that you're used to, stop the bad habits and live a healthier lifestyle when you're forced to make an adjustment but if your health and future depends on it, you have no other choice but to make the right decisions.

It has been just over 6 months since I have been on treatment for MS and I have my days where I feel the side effects of my medication or the symptoms of the MS. I also find it difficult when

others have not been able to understand the disease as the symptoms are invisible and I do not physically look ill. In those instances, I try my best to explain MS and provide more information on it but cannot expect others to understand it completely. I once read a post on Instagram that said, "You don't get MS until you get it" and it's so true!

Overall, I do my best to keep a positive outlook on my life. I was able to travel abroad in the first month that I started my treatment and it gave me a new perspective on things. I then realised that I should not put limitations on myself and that self-care is so important. I also started a 40 by 40 bucket list of things that I would like to achieve before I turn 40 years old and I'm proud to say that I have ticked off a few items already in the past few months. My parents have always been supportive of me and so I try to remember my mum's words of encouragement on a regular basis and take my dad's advice when given. I have also had such a great support network of loved ones and support groups which I believe is very important. They all add to my positive outlook, provide assistance when needed and help me understand and manage the MS.

As I reach the 1-year milestone of being diagnosed with MS, my health may not be 100% but I'm determined to push through. I have started to pick up from the goals that I had set for 2019 and I am patient with myself to achieve them at my own pace. I may have been diagnosed with MS, but I am determined to never give up and continue to live a rewarding life.