

Flo's story: a journey thro

I am in my mid 60s and 30 years ago I contracted hep C via a blood transfusion. I had been a blood donor for many years, and was regularly giving donations up until 1990, when I received a letter to attend the clinic for further testing. Unfortunately those tests proved positive for hep C. I was referred to a gastroenterologist and remain a client of that clinic.

Little was known about hep C in those days; I remember being told that within 20 years I would have deterioration in my health due to liver fibrosis. I decided to change my lifestyle and started using complementary therapies, but was aware of the need to continue contact with the clinic, and have kept in good health.

In the mid 1990s, one did not disclose being hep C positive, except to medical or other staff if requiring a procedure. On one occasion before surgery I was told I would be last on the list due to my hep C status. Fortunately, health workers are more educated these days and hopefully patients are not discriminated against. Having required surgery several times since, I have not been aware of any discrimination.

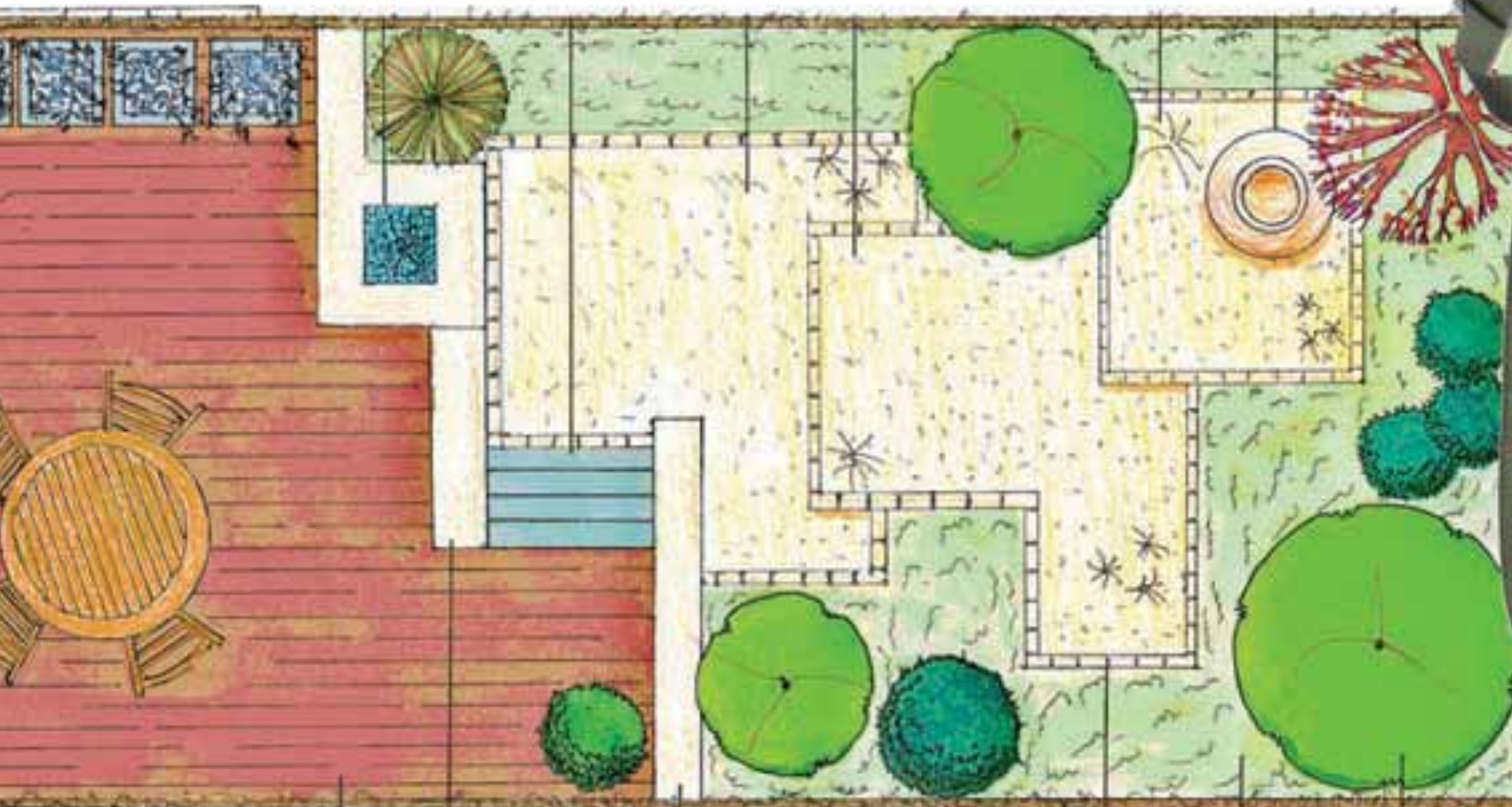
I have always worked full-time in a stressful position, exercised and led a very busy lifestyle. I have been fortunate to not have any symptoms from the virus except for a slightly elevated ALT and AST. I have suffered from arthritis and hypertension but these run in the family and are not due to the virus.

Seven years ago I was involved in a five year research project. This involved a full medical history, medications both prescribed and complementary, monthly blood tests, and a liver biopsy at commencement and completion.

The result of the biopsy at commencement was fibrosis 1, but at the completion it was fibrosis 2-3, which was a complete surprise to my consultant and me.

Treatment was discussed and I reluctantly agreed to an appointment with a treatment CNC. In the meantime I acquired as much information as was available on treatment, side effects, research results for genotype 1 and the response rate.

A close friend attended that first appointment with me as we knew that due to my negative attitude towards treatment, I



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would not take in much of the information. It also helped to have someone to discuss the information with and help with decision making. Forty-eight weeks is a long time to commit to. I was booked to go on an overseas trip in the latter part of 2007, but agreed to commence treatment on return.

My treatment CNC suggested that I take sick leave for the first month, and I organised this. I was fortunate to work in a good team with very supportive and understanding leaders and staff.

Treatment was commenced in the first week of November 2007, and the first few weeks were relatively symptom free, except for occasional nausea, dyspepsia (indigestion) and increased arthritic pain. These I chose to ignore and continued on with my walking, exercising and gardening. Unfortunately a disc in my back herniated, pinching two nerves, and I was unable

to return to work for four months.

On return to full-time work, I found myself very tired at the end of a shift, as my neutrophils and lymphocytes were very low. I was breathless climbing stairs, walking and doing any form of exercise.

At week 12, the viral load had only decreased by 2 log, and at week 24 it was indeterminate, but on retesting, the virus had cleared.

Working was a distraction from the side effects, but I didn't listen to my body and twice more became sick and required time off work. I developed bronchitis for the first time and now have a chronic cough.

I would like to pass on some valuable advice. Nurture yourself. If you work, make sure you have plenty of rest times. Only do the necessary housework and accept help from family and friends graciously. If necessary, pay someone to do your heavy housework, gardening and lawns.

I am blessed to have caring family and friends, an excellent treatment team and very supportive work colleagues who have helped me cope, particularly in the latter stages of treatment. With only two weeks of treatment to go, I look forward to returning to my former energy, socialising at night without wilting, spending a whole day window shopping and a holiday later down the track. I am confident I will be a "sustained responder" and when I have my final blood test in six months' time, the virus will indeed be gone.

Flo, NSW



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