



my story

Paul's story: twenty-five years on and twenty weeks to go

I had hep C for 20 years before I did 48 weeks of combination therapy in 2005. I took it on not thinking too much about the side effects.

"I'm doing this treatment, I'm not going to worry too much about what happens, I'm just going to do it," I told myself.

The virus was undetectable in four weeks and I didn't get any flu-like symptoms or any headaches; the worst side effects I had were constant itching and a subtle downwards mood swing.

I treated the itching with a few different things before I discovered Pinetarsol bath oil. The mood swing tended towards reclusiveness and was harder to notice. I wasn't doing the things that I usually love to do like spending time with my daughter or surfing.

I do still have some fond memories of my year with combination treatment. I pushed my reclusiveness aside to sail to Hobart on the *James Craig* tall ship and I have exhilarating memories that will last a lifetime. Treatment also coincided with a time of change. It was linked to the idea that if I got rid of the virus, it would be easier to find someone. Indeed, not long after treatment finished, I met my new partner.

About two weeks after my last ribavirin pills, the specialist rang me at work and told me I had relapsed. I sat there, got teary for a minute. I started to tell people, made a few calls, told a few people at work. It was a bit of a slap in the face, but after a few days I was over it. I had given it a shot.

It's been four years and I find myself on treatment again. It's not standard treatment as I am on a 48 weeks triple therapy clinical trial. All seems to be currently going well. It plays with the emotions a bit – but that's nothing new compared to last time. The big difference this time is the wonderful support I get from my wife. Add to this a supportive workplace and I don't think I can complain too much.

People's perceptions of treatment are sometimes out of whack with the reality. I would definitely encourage people to give it a go. Find out about it and don't go in blindly but give it a go. The potential rewards of treatment far outweigh doing nothing.

Paul, NSW

Photographer unknown (James Craig crew mate)