

Joanne's Story

In her own words: My path through stroke and rehabilitation.



Hunters Moor Neurological Rehabilitation Centre
Birmingham

As I reflect on the past year, I realise that my journey toward recovery began unexpectedly during what should have been a joyous time. Glastonbury, usually a highlight in my calendar, became a turning point when I first started feeling unwell. What began as a seemingly minor issue—a bug bite—escalated into a series of health challenges that would change my life. This account of my journey outlines the physical and emotional hurdles I faced, from the initial symptoms to my ongoing recovery at Hunters Moor Neurological Rehabilitation Centre in Birmingham, and the profound impact this experience has had on me and those around me.

Glastonbury in June 2023 marked the beginning of my ordeal. It was there that I was bitten by something unpleasant, leading to severe headaches, excessive sweating, and a swollen ankle and foot. I endured these symptoms for a week before they overshadowed my mum's 70th birthday weekend away, which culminated in a trip to A&E. The doctors suspected a reaction to the bite and prescribed antihistamines and antibiotics. While the antibiotics provided some relief, I began to suspect that perimenopausal symptoms and fatigue might also be contributing to my condition.


Concerned, I visited my GP, who arranged blood tests and eventually referred me to a rheumatologist in early July 2023. Around this time, I developed a persistent cough, chest pain, and overwhelming fatigue. Despite a clear chest X-ray, I was advised to undergo further testing. My health continued to deteriorate, and by late August 2023, I was unable to stand or speak properly. I was rushed to Good Hope Hospital in Birmingham, where I experienced vomiting and what was initially suspected to be a stroke. This was just days before I was supposed to fly to Las Vegas for my husband's 50th birthday.

Following this episode, I was admitted to Good Hope Hospital, where I stayed until early September 2023. I was discharged but returned for an outpatient appointment only to find that my blood pressure was dangerously high. Shortly afterward, my condition worsened, culminating in a stroke and a brain haemorrhage on the 19th of September, triggered by a blood pressure spike to 222/100. I spent three weeks in the Intensive Therapy Unit (ITU) with minimal awareness of what was happening around me. During this time, I lost the ability to feel on the right side of my body, and my vision and speech were severely affected.

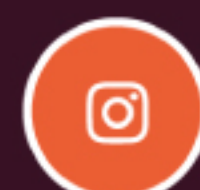
Subsequent tests, including an MRI and PET scan at the Queen Elizabeth (QE) Hospital in Birmingham, sought to uncover the underlying cause of my stroke. By November 2023, I was transferred back to Good Hope Hospital, where I continued my recovery in the stroke ward, receiving physiotherapy and monitoring until I was moved to a rehabilitation centre.


I arrived at Hunters Moor Neurological Rehabilitation Centre on the 13th of December 2023, filled with hope and ready to begin the next chapter of my recovery. The transition was challenging, particularly as I adjusted to less frequent monitoring of my blood pressure, which had become a source of anxiety. However, the staff at Hunters Moor reassured me that my focus should be on rehabilitation, and I gradually learned to relax.

In the first few weeks, I struggled with mobility, even with the assistance of two carers. By early January, my husband noticed a significant change in my speech—it was slurred, and I was having difficulty communicating. My vision had also deteriorated, and I felt generally unwell. An MRI revealed that I had suffered a second stroke, with another brain haemorrhage. I was immediately admitted to Heartlands Hospital in Birmingham, where I stayed for five days before being transferred back to the QE Neurological Ward for further testing.




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Despite the ongoing uncertainty, all signs pointed towards vasculitis, though the tests remained inconclusive. After five weeks at the QE, I was moved back to Hunters Moor, where I was once again welcomed with open arms. The rehabilitation process resumed, and to my surprise, I started making significant progress—taking my first proper steps in a long time.

However, recovery is rarely linear, on the 20th of March 2024, I woke up in the early hours with severe pain in my side and chest. I struggled to breathe and move, prompting an emergency trip to the QE Hospital, where I was diagnosed with blood clots and pneumonia. Fortunately, the condition was caught in time, and after a week in the hospital, I returned to Hunters Moor. From that point on, my recovery gained momentum, and I began walking short distances without assistance.



I was discharged from Hunters Moor in July 2024, throughout my stay at Hunters Moor the support from everyone—from the cleaners to the nurses and physiotherapists—has been invaluable.

They provided not only physical rehabilitation but also psychological support, helping me to process the trauma I had experienced. I realised that my recovery was not just about regaining physical abilities but also about healing mentally and emotionally.

During my time at Hunters Moor, I declined the offer of temporary accommodation while my home was being adapted by social services. Instead, with the help of my husband and friends, we made the necessary adjustments so I could return home. I've learned so much from the staff and fellow patients, and I've even started participating in activities like running quizzes and gardening.

My journey has taught me that recovery is ongoing. The more you engage in repetitive tasks, the more your brain relearns how to communicate with your body. I'm now determined to use my experience to help others, perhaps through counselling, as I know firsthand how isolating and challenging this path can be. Recovery isn't just about the individual—it's a journey that involves family, friends, and an entire community of support.



To make a referral or for more information about Hunters Moor Neurological Rehabilitation service please call 01732 779353 or email referrals@activecaregroup.co.uk

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