

# Patient's voice: perspective and persistence

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Throughout my younger years, I loved my football. No injuries, no pressure; just freedom and pleasure. However, the older I got, the taller I grew, and the stronger I became, the more complications I was faced with through injuries. In January 2020, after a long travel up to Aberdeen, Scotland, the pain in the front of my knee was just unbearable. This pain had bothered me for months before this game, but no one could put their finger on what it really was. I was just told to take weeks out and then try again. I really wished for a diagnosis and management plan!

## FLUCTUATING FEELINGS

At this point in my career, I experienced positive and negative feelings towards the game: the excitement of being told I would do preseason and have game-time with reserves was the best news I had ever had, but this never really came to anything due to both injuries and COVID-19. The intermittent breaks from football were not helping my injury at all. Then the country went into lockdown. The accompanying uncertainty further challenged me mentally. Until then, I never had any idea of what injuries—or any struggle in life—could do to your own mental health.

It was alien to me not being able to run about the pitch with my teammates. A divide formed with teammates due to not seeing them, and them having no reason to talk to me. I felt as if half of my life had been taken from me and it did not feel like I was going to get it back anytime soon. As the pandemic took hold and my isolation worsened, my mental health declined. My injury was still not accurately diagnosed and I was left just waiting. I had a mindset of not playing anymore, a fear of not being as good when I returned to play and having to investigate other paths in life. I seemed constantly stuck in my negative thought pattern.

## A NEW VISION ... AND HOPE!

A few months into lockdown and my club held a Zoom call with all the players to announce there would be a new member of staff joining the club to lead the academy's medical department. This was a turning point in my attitude, hoping he would be able to solve my problems. I contacted him straight away. Through Zoom calls and messages, he seemed to know

immediately what the problem was ... and the plan we needed to fix it: patellar tendinopathy. Throughout lockdown, he would give me exercises remotely and after lockdown eased, we started to do more on the pitch. This was physically demanding after more than a year out but provided attainable goals. I had my mind fixed on my dream after battling both physical and mental challenges.

## PERSPECTIVE

One thing I learnt throughout my rehabilitation was that I was going to go through great times where I achieve my goals and get past my injury, but also times where it is not going so well. I learnt this after developing yet another injury while I was coming back from patellar tendinopathy and I was again challenged mentally, not knowing what was next and having recurrent negative thoughts about my career. This again impacted my mental health as I felt like I had done all the work for my patella tendinopathy to recover, then had to do it all over again. Support from my family helped as they knew how challenging I found these times, and the input from the new medical team was invaluable. Having a diagnosis and plan were key.

## RESOLUTELY CHASING A GOAL

I was then asked to train with the reserves for their preseason in the summer. My family had already booked a holiday for the dates of preseason, but I made the decision to stay and go to preseason to show how dedicated and committed I was to achieve the dream I have had since I first kicked a ball. I felt strong and fit after these injuries but was made aware that the knee would not go without another couple of flare-ups. I started preseason but was not as fit as I should have been. I had set myself a target to get to a level where I was fitter than my teammates and I worked hard and did extra with the sports science team.

Since then, it has been stop-start and I still struggle mentally to deal with these injuries but I always think back to what I went through and how I got through it. Throughout these injuries, there have been comments made about how I am always injured but I know these comments are made by people who do not really understand the struggle an injury can cause, especially patella tendinopathy with



the amount of time it took to recover and also the spontaneous returns it comes with. They also do not understand how much injuries can deflate your mental health and how bad you can feel over something you cannot control yourself.

The injury has allowed me to learn more about my body and how to protect it from further injury. The main thing I have learnt from it though is the amount of ups and downs you will need to push yourself through and how badly it can affect you mentally.

Thanks to the medical staff I am healthy, strong, fitter than ever and more importantly much stronger mentally than I ever have been and I will continue to push for my goals no matter the struggles and blocks thrown at me as I have the experience of my rehab and what I had to go through then.

**Contributors** CJ is the sole author.

**Funding** The author has not declared a specific grant for this research from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

**Competing interests** None declared.

**Patient consent for publication** Not applicable.

**Ethics approval** Not applicable.

**Provenance and peer review** Commissioned; internally peer reviewed.

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**To cite** Johnston C. *Br J Sports Med* 2022;**56**:770.

Accepted 29 April 2022

Published Online First 9 June 2022

*Br J Sports Med* 2022;**56**:770.

doi:10.1136/bjsports-2022-105864