

Charlie's story

Born and bred in Manchester, Charlie aged 72, has always been an active person with a passion for photography and DIY. When he was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis just before his 70th birthday, severe pain meant Charlie was unable to do the hobbies he loved. Here he shares how taking part in research has found the right treatment for him...

I've always been a busy person, never one to sit down and watch TV. I've worked hard all my life so when I decided to retire at 65, I was looking forward to spending more time on my hobbies and past times, including photography.

I've been a keen photographer since I was young. I used to shoot on film and would spend a lot of my time carefully developing photos in my dark room, but now I've gone digital.

After enjoying retired life for a few years, I started getting pain in my hands a bit before my 70th birthday. At the time I didn't think much of this and carried on with my day-to-day life. Soon however, the pain and discomfort moved to my shoulders and become so bad that I couldn't hold or use the controls on my camera.

A photo of Wasterwater in the Lake District by Charlie

It wasn't just my hobbies that the pain affected. Simple things like cooking were almost impossible, I couldn't pick up pans due to the weight and even trying to cut and butter a piece of bread left me in pain.

At that point I went to see my GP who did a series of tests and diagnosed me with rheumatoid arthritis, which was a shock. It wasn't until this point that I realised how much I enjoyed using my hands, either through my photography or doing DIY on the house. I'm not one for sitting around, and I started to worry that I'd have to give up the things I love and be confined to my chair or bed.

My GP referred me to The Kellgren Centre, MRI (Manchester Royal Infirmary), and I saw Dr Ho who, whilst talking about treatment options, mentioned that there was a new research study that I might be eligible for. The study was trialling a new type of medicine for people who had recently been diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis.

Taking part in research has had a really positive impact on my life, allowing me to get back to what I love. Without people taking part in research, we can't find new or better medicines so I'd advise everyone to consider it if it's an option for them.

I'd never really thought about medical research before then, Dr Ho explained that it would mean I'd be able to try out a new treatment that doctors thought would help better manage rheumatoid arthritis and the symptoms that come with it. I'd have regular appointments at the Kellgren Centre, MRI (Manchester Royal Infirmary), where the research team would monitor my progress and see if the treatment was working.

I took some time to think about it and decided it was a good opportunity. I had my first research clinic appointment with Dr Ho and the research team at the MRI. She explained why they were conducting the study, what they hoped to achieve and what was required in terms of taking the new treatment and monitoring appointments. She answered some questions I had and I was then consented to take part in the study.

Soon after I started taking the new medicine I could notice a difference. I didn't want to get too excited, as I knew there was a chance it wouldn't work for me. As the weeks went on the pain decreased and I was slowly able to get back to an active life including walking, driving and taking landscape photography. I also really enjoyed going to my research appointments, finding out about my progress whilst on the study.

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