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Simplifying employee experiences

November is Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS) Awareness Month, and with Disability Awareness Month now underway, it's a timely opportunity to highlight the importance of recognising invisible conditions at work. In this month's colleague spotlight, Nicola Turner shares her experience of living with CRPS, demonstrating how understanding and flexibility can make a meaningful difference.

How did your CRPS first develop?

Around eight years ago, after carpal tunnel surgery, I began experiencing constant pain in my arm. I was later diagnosed with Complex Regional Pain Syndrome CRPS – a rare, chronic condition that affects the nerves and causes severe, burning pain. It started in my wrist and spread up my arm, shoulder, and neck. Even light touch, clothing, or a breeze can trigger pain. There's no cure, so I focus on managing symptoms and staying positive, knowing there are others worse off.

How does it affect your daily life?

I live with pain 24/7 and experience flare-ups that cause swelling and loss of movement. Temperature changes, being knocked, or stress can make things worse. Medication, pacing myself, and meditation help me cope. I've learned not to overdo things on good days, or I'll pay for it later.

> **"I try to stay positive and focus on what I can do rather than what I can't."**

How was your diagnosis journey?

It took about a year to get diagnosed, which is quick compared to most. My GP listened and referred me to a specialist at The Walton Centre in Liverpool. Before that, one consultant told me it was "all in my head", which was incredibly disheartening. Getting a clear diagnosis was a relief. It helped to know I was being believed and that there was a reason behind the pain. Many people wait years for that understanding.

CRPS might be part of my life, but it doesn't define me. I try to stay positive, do what I can, and focus on helping others understand the condition better, both inside and outside of work.

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How has AdviserPlus supported you in managing your condition at work?

I joined around four and a half years ago after seeing the role online. I was upfront about my condition in the interview, and the team were understanding from day one. Working from home has made a huge difference. It lets me manage flare-ups and rest when needed, while still doing my job effectively. The flexibility and adjustments have been key to staying in work.

> **"Most people would be in bed screaming with the pain I feel every day but you just have to get on with it."**

What do you wish more people understood about CRPS?

It's often misunderstood or dismissed, even by some medical professionals. People assume it's just "a bit of pain" or an excuse to stay home, when in reality it's completely life-changing.

It can also be isolating — you lose energy for socialising, and some friends drift away because they don't understand why you can't always join in. Raising awareness is so important so others don't have to face that same judgment.

> **"Just because you can't see it doesn't mean it isn't real."**

What advice would you give to others living with chronic conditions - or to employers?

Listen to your body and trust yourself. Keep pushing for answers if something doesn't feel right. For employers, it's about understanding and flexibility. Talk to your people about what they can do and what support they need. Small adjustments make a huge difference.

How do you relax and recharge?

Knitting has become my go-to hobby over the past couple of years — it helps distract my mind and keeps my hands moving gently. I've made everything from cardigans to little gifts, including a Vera-themed present for my mum!

I also love walking my dog, getting fresh air, and reading. It's about finding small things that bring peace and help take your focus away from the pain, even if just for a little while.

For further resources or to make a donation in support of CRPS Awareness Month, please visit the Burning Nights CRPS Awareness Month page.

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