

MICHAEL HOCKNEY MBE CCMI FRSCM FSA
the founder and co-chairman of the
Lord Mayor's Big Curry Lunch

In conversation with
JO-ANNE NIGHTINGALE
late of Her Majesty's Royal Navy
a 'graduate' of the Pain Management Programme
at the Centre for Veterans' Health
King Edward VII Hospital
at the Lord Mayor's Banquet
to mark the success of the first twelve Curry Lunches

The Mansion House
Wednesday 6th November 2019



Jo; it's marvellous to have you with us. Thank you for agreeing to chat with me about your experiences.

1. Tell us a little about when and why you joined up? Were you from a military family?

I joined up in November 2001. I was eighteen and about to finish my public services course at college. The course was designed to help get you ready for any public service, but I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do. It was suggested by my tutor that I join the Navy as a short Engagement Seaman.

This was a 2 year contract. You could leave after this time or sign up for the full engagement and choose a trade to go in to. I don't have any other family members serving; only my Dad was in the TA many years ago.

2. How did you get on? Where did you serve?

I loved my time, serving on HMS CUMBERLAND and being deployed in and around the Gulf for over 8 months. As a result I decided to stay on and I signed up. I initially trained as a dental nurse. I worked in many places including with the Royal Marines at RM STONEHOUSE, seeing in the new recruits at HMS RALEIGH, as well as an 18 month posting to Gibraltar.

I was promoted to manager of the dental practice. This meant I was in charge of ensuring the practice was running smoothly at all times. By then I had completed 12 years of service.

3. From what you've told me, you were a pretty keen sportswoman

I had kept up my level of fitness which you are expected to do. I never once failed my fitness test, even when I was heavily pregnant. I represented the Navy in swimming and won the inter-services championships in bobsleigh. However, I felt I needed more of a challenge and so followed my dreams to become a Royal Navy Physical Training Instructor.

4. This all sounds very positive in terms of career development and lots of sport. But that wasn't the whole story, was it?

About five years after I joined up I was diagnosed with a rare condition which affected my hip. This condition affected the fluid in my hip joint. This fluid is meant to keep the joint moving smoothly but mine was slowly crystallising. This was affecting my movement and was extremely painful. The crystals had to be removed. Sadly, the surgery I had caused some nerve damage which left me in agonising pain for many years.

I worked really hard at getting my fitness and strength back as I've always been active and a keen sportsperson. I completed the Physical Training Instructor course in November 2014, but after a few months in my first posting there were times when I was unable to walk. Then I was diagnosed with a labral tear in the same hip, which meant my cartilage has come away from the bone around the ball of the joint. There were also signs of degeneration in the joint. At this point I had my fourth bout of surgery.

Shortly after that I attended the Medical Review Board, where it was decided my long term prognosis was not looking good and therefore I should be discharged from the Service.



5. That must have been a really low point for you. I get the sense you had been trying to cope with pain for many years?

The pain I felt during my time in the Navy varied from day to day. But it was ongoing and the pain started to affect the quality of my work life and my home life and still does to some degree. Taking medication daily was not agreeing with my body either, so this made it worse.

6. How did you hear about the Pain Management Programme at the Centre for Veterans' Health at the King Edward VII Hospital?

I first approached one of the service charities in Plymouth, which was very quick in responding to my needs. Before I knew it I was put in touch with the Hospital for an assessment.

7. What was the Pain Management Programme like?

PMP was amazing! I learned so much about why pain happens, how to manage flare-ups of pain with and without using medication and how to adapt life to prevent the flare-ups in the first place.

The first part of the course was five consecutive days at the Hospital. It was quite intense as there was a lot to take in very quickly. We then took what we had learned away and tried to put it into practice. We then went back for day visits every few weeks, so the team could assess how we doing and plan goals each time.

On one of the days, our significant others were invited to attend with us in order for them to gain further insight into what we had been doing and how they could help at home with the pain management. The whole team on the Pain Management Programme work in perfect harmony and they're quick to identify areas for each individual where you might need extra care.

What I have learned from my time on this course has drastically improved my mental health. It didn't happen overnight, but with perseverance and an open mind it has changed my life. My pain is still there, but I'm dealing with it better now.

8. Where did the PMP leave you?

It have left me with the tools to move forward in my life.

I know that if I ever did need to speak to any of the team at the Centre for Veterans' Health in the future, I could just contact them and I know they will help.

9. How you feel today?

For the most part I am in a lot better place than this time last year. I still have very difficult days but that's to be expected.

10. What work are you doing?

Since leaving, I have trained as a dog groomer. I decided to try to remain positive and to use this opportunity to put my children first when it came to working hours. By being self-employed I could work exactly the hours I needed to be able to be around them, as well as manage my workload to prevent any pain flare-ups.

11. Do tell everyone about your new business

My business start-up in Newton Abbot in Devon is called *All Paws on Deck*; I had to keep the name nautical! It's doing very well considering it's only one year in.

Jo; what a note of success to end on. I am sure that those of us who have pets and live in Devon will be beating a path to your door.

Thank you for sharing your story with us. We will all want to wish you every success in the future.

