Dear Gillian,

I was diagnosed with MS 20 years ago so I may not have been subjected to the latest approach towards pastoral care. My professor was more interested in picking my brains about saving his hospital as I had met Virginia Bottomley during the course of my advertising work. I hope I helped him because he knew he could do little for me.

I was given a diagnosis of Primary Progressive MS, which meant my illness would constantly progress with no remission. So it wasn't a great diagnosis to get but, at least, I had a name to put to the constant fatigue I'd been experiencing. I thought I was just being lazy: trying to cope with three kids under six and a new business that was suffering from the recession of the early nineties. So, it may seem strange, but I was pleased to get a concrete diagnosis. I thought I would be able to deal with it. But, that was pure hubris as my deteriorating condition was to show.

I have lost the ability to move any of my limbs, my eyesight is compromised by nystagmus (constant spasms in the eye muscles) and I am now finding it difficult to speak or even swallow. So my belief that I would be able to cope with my deteriorating condition was, indeed, pure hubris.

Despite all this I have managed to stay around for long enough to watch my three children become 20 year olds. This has given me immense joy but the progression of the illness has been painful, both physically and psychologically.

Going back to my original diagnosis, it could have been handled better but it seemed appropriate given the medical ethics of the time. I was told straight, without any sugar coating, and I accepted it. They did not tell me what was likely to happen which I understand, as they did not know. If they could have predicted exactly what has happened, I would not have wanted to know. Sometimes, honesty is not appropriate, particularly when there are so many variables.

Overall, just to get a diagnosis was sufficient at the time. The prognosis was unclear and I would not have wanted to know what the future would bring.

I hope this is of some help.

Yours,
Alasdair Fraser

Transcribed by Alasdair's carer.