

ADHD and me

Mental Health Awareness Week 10-14th May 2021

Neal Mankey, Director in our Health team, has been telling us the story of his journey with ADHD and depression. If you missed it, please read part one [HERE](#) which leads us through his childhood and formative adult years. This part concentrates on the crisis point that led to his diagnosis.

PART 2

I stayed at the same recruitment company, miserable and isolated, for what felt like a lifetime but was, in reality, only four years. It was then that I realised I'd had enough, thought that the grass was greener, and moved on to pastures new. Terrible decision! Over the next three years, I had three different jobs. Though I didn't know it at the time, two of these I left because of my behaviours, my approach, my lack of focus on the job, and also my employers lack of knowledge, understanding and adaptability in how to manage me. At this time, my relationship with alcohol took a turn which only served to accentuate my anxiety. I used drinking as a way to escape the thoughts that I'd go to sleep and wake up with: a constant, overwhelming barrage in my head that I couldn't seem to control.



My other half has been directly and, at times, very negatively, impacted by my behaviours. I impulsively once bought myself a brand new Audi for a birthday without telling her. I even left her without warning for four months because I thought I wanted more. It was now that I finally conceded that I needed help and admitted this to her. The first step in my journey to a diagnosis began with a course of anti-depressants. I still use them to this day and, whilst they may not be for everyone and they still retain that social stigma, in spite of my own scepticism for a good 12 months to begin with, they have, without doubt, helped me.

Knowing that I had anxiety and depression wasn't a surprise to me, it just took a while to finally admit it. There is a history of this in my family. My grandfather took his own life and those are urges that I have had to fight myself in my darkest days. I was still uncomfortable with the fact that I didn't know WHY I suffered from anxiety and depression. So many questions remained unanswered. Why couldn't I hold down a job? Why did I feel so out of place? Why did I lack focus? Why was I burnt out all the time? Why did I feel at odds with the world? These feelings compounded my complete lack of confidence in my ability as a recruiter, which brought on the anxiety and depression again, which, in turn, led to drinking to wipe out the emotions and confusion in my head. It was a vicious circle. Something had to change, and it was purely by luck that I happened to see a programme one night that featured a young guy in his mid-twenties who had recently been diagnosed with ADHD.

As he went through his symptoms, it felt as though he was reading my mind. Easily distracted – tick, impulsive – tick, hyperactive – tick, poor memory – tick, easily bored, prone to procrastination, mood swings, quick tempered, easily irritated, unable to deal with stress, extreme impatience, speaking out of turn/offending others, restless – all ticks. It was a defining moment for me. I looked at my other half and in a split second we had both diagnosed me with ADHD.

I knew it wasn't as easy as that but it sparked endless google searches, online tests and the increasing conviction that I had to get this diagnosis confirmed. A trip to my GP revealed that it would be a long and slow process and, being a (now medically diagnosed!) impatient individual, I decided to spend my own money and found an ADHD specialist in Harley Street who, after a few short hours diagnosed Major Depressive Disorder Co-morbid with ADHD of the combined type. I'm still trying to get a grip on what that actually means both in medical and layman's terms.

The causes and risk-factors of ADHD are still unknown. There are currently no known proactive steps to be taken in order to prevent ADHD from occurring or to mitigate the development of it; only strategies, practices and medications to manage it.

VEREDUS TALKS

The relief of a diagnosis was palpable. Finally, I was starting to get some answers which could shed light on some of my past escapades, failed attempts to settle in a job, lack of focus, speaking out of turn, mood swings and quick temper, difficulties in my childhood, my relationship with alcohol and recreational drugs etc.

There are currently two medication routes for those with ADHD – drugs that temper symptoms and responses, or lift your mood and make it easier to manage feelings of depression and exclusion, and drugs that stimulate which sounds strange but actually counteract the overstimulation you already experience. I've stayed on the sertraline which is for anxiety and depression, and I am still exploring whether the stimulants are an avenue I want to go down. Because so little is actually known for sure, it tends to be a 'suck it and see' situation – you don't know if it works for you until you try. There are many organisations out there who can offer support, however, I haven't seen a therapist or counsellor for a while. Research has helped me to understand that a lack of exercise was my kryptonite. I restructured my daily routine to involve 20 minutes of yoga, 15 minutes of meditation and some form of exercise for an hour before my working day started. I'm only human and not every day pans out like this, but more often than not, they do, and when they don't it's usually not for the better. These adjustments, trying to eat a healthy, balanced diet, and learning to live in the present rather than be held back by the past or anxious about the future, have all been massively impactful.

Being diagnosed has made my life much easier in many ways as it's helped me and others around me reach a form of acceptance. I now understand why I struggle in certain areas of my mental health and the effect this has on both my personal and professional life.

My relationship with alcohol has had to change and, whilst I never considered myself an alcoholic, my drinking usually started on a Thursday and finished on Sunday, and was very much all or nothing. Due to my impulsive behaviour, I couldn't just have one beer, or one glass of wine, if the bottle was open, it had to be finished. My counsellor advised me that I was a "functioning" alcoholic, something I'm still not entirely sure I agree with, but maybe that's just denial. The day after the night before only helped heighten the fear, anxiety, lack of confidence and overall sense that I wasn't good enough, and I knew deep down that this had to stop. I'd find myself being an absent father to my kids and a poor partner to my good lady. I found it difficult to look them in the eye due to the shame of my depression and feelings of worthlessness. When I left - four months of sofa surfing with mates - I had a breakdown and realised what I had was EXACTLY what I needed, a stable home life, a partner who was and is incredibly supportive, and two boys who are the reason I do everything I do each day.

I tried, a number of times over 2020, going "dry" and managed two or three months before falling back into the usual cycle. Being in lockdown, at home, allowing boredom to take over really didn't help. I am, however, 100% dry in 2021 and the change this has had not only to my mental health but physical health too has been great, not to mention the positive influence on my overall behaviour and outlook on life. Don't get me wrong, I still have my moments, as we all do, but being able to think with a clearer mind has been a Godsend. Alcohol is a depressant, simple fact, so feeding a depressive mind with booze just doesn't work.

The journey continues tomorrow with the third instalment, during which Neal talks about ADHD in the working world.....

If you struggle with ADHD, here are some helpful resources:

Jessica McCabe's TED talk 'This is what it's really like to live with ADHD' - link [here](#)

Delivered from Distraction: Getting the most out of life with attention - John R Ratey

Scattered Minds: The Origins and Healing of Attention Deficit Disorder - Dr Gabor Maté

[ADHD UK](#)

