

# The Legs Matter campaign: reflections on COVID-19 and 'get loud for legs'



**DR LEANNE ATKIN**  
*Vascular Nurse Consultant/  
Lecturer, Mid Yorks NHS Trust/  
University of Huddersfield*



**TRACY GOODWIN**  
*Patient representative Legs Matter*

So this year has not been a year anyone ever planned for or imagined could ever be possible. The impact of COVID-19 have been felt across the world, COVID-19 has taken so much from so many, with the loss of a loved one being the cruellest of impacts. It has changed summer for all of us, no summer holidays, limited socialising with friends and many events cancelled. This included our planned awareness week. Last year the efforts by so many across the UK really helped to raise the awareness of lower limb conditions, with many 'Legs matters matters' and Leg health checks, education events. I have always known, in general, healthcare is filled with passionate, caring people but what I did not realise was also how brilliantly creative and skilled many of you are. I have so many fond memories of all the colourful bunting, cakes, buns, posters, socks etc—your skills blew me away. I have two favourites from that week. The first was a cake of a bandaged limb which even had its toenails discoloured like the patient who had been using potassium permanganate—a great eye for detail. The second was the amazing talents of Laura MacKay, (Community Staff Nurse, Adult and Community Healthcare Team, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust) whose sketch of a person suffering with a leg ulcer (*Figure 1*) is still etched on my mind—just a perfect visual reflection of what our patients go through every single day.

We have all faced our own challenges over the last few months, I don't know of one healthcare professional or person who has not been affected by this awful pandemic. I certainly had my own wobble and it was helped by writing a blog entitled 'it is ok not to be ok', I think the title summarises the content. Following this, I received such a wonderful outpouring of love, concern and compassion from all over the UK. It really made me feel better to talk and to share as the one good thing about all of this is that we are not alone—we really are all in this together.

*Leanne Atkin*

It has also provided us with some time to reflect, prioritise and to consider where we are now. Lockdown has been a time of reflection for me (Tracy). It has reminded me of how bad things were when my leg ulcer was at its worst, of a time when I honestly thought my life would never improve. During this time, I had only three wishes: that I could have an undisturbed night's sleep without the constant throbbing in my leg waking me; that I could have a shower or bath without all the hassle and upset of a painful dressing change; that I could leave the house without worrying about the smell and pain of my leg ulcer. I didn't have a social life, I couldn't go out to work and I was unable to walk, let alone exercise. Thankfully, my ulcer, which I suffered with for almost 15 years, has healed. My life has improved so much. I no longer need to take a constant diet of analgesics and plan my day around how my leg is going to feel. I'm sleeping well, I can walk our dogs every day and be much more active. I've read many reports showing an increase in mental health struggles since the coronavirus pandemic started, some of the reasons for struggling are because people cannot see their friends and loved ones. They can't work or continue with their recreational activities and as a result, they may have been less active or gained weight. This has had a negative effect on their self-worth and self-image. These are all feelings I know all too well. For some, lockdown has been a complete life change. But for others, including many of the million leg ulcer patients across the country, old and young, there's been no change. They don't go out to pubs and restaurants because they are conscious of the smell and look of their legs, they don't meet their friends because they are drained from the sleepless nights and constant pain. They can't work because of the impact that having a chronic leg ulcer has on their lives. For many leg ulcer sufferers lockdown is a consent state.

*Tracy Goodwin*



*Figure 1. Sketch of a person suffering with a leg ulcer by Laura MacKay*

#### **WHAT NEXT: GET LOUD FOR LEGS**

Now, more than ever, we need to continue to raise the awareness of leg and feet conditions, really trying to target prevention and early intervention. To ensure Legs Matter continues to drive these important messages home we are planning an awareness event for the week of the 12–16 October where we plan to ‘get loud for legs’ calling out that, despite COVID-19, we can’t afford to wait any longer to tackle leg and foot

problems. Empowering patients not to be silent, reminding health professionals that leg and foot patients may have gone quiet but they have not gone away and informing commissions that we cannot ignore patients with foot and leg issues and the longer they go untreated the more costly they become. So this year more than ever we need you, our army of supporters, to get creative and get loud because this October we will be shouting out for legs!

**WUK**