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'Parkinson's was not the end for me'

By Jane Elliott

Health reporter, BBC News

As Barry Sidaway sat in the board room hearing how he had helped turn round the fortunes of a loss-making company, he was well aware that it should have been one of his proudest moments.



Barry was determined to work with his condition

But instead of basking in the glory of his hard work, his head was completely filled by two words - "incurable" and "progressive".

That morning, at the age of just 44, Barry had been told he had Parkinson's disease.

People with the condition have a shortage of the brain chemical dopamine, which controls connections between nerve cells, leading to symptoms such as tremors.

Bleak

But despite his suspicions over the three months of tests the final diagnosis was a cruel blow.

"I have no recollection of the journey into London. But at noon I was crossing the bridge at Battersea with the knowledge that I had an incurable disease, not knowing how it was going to affect me or what the future was."

An inquisitive and determined man, Barry researched everything he could about the disease, but found nothing positive.

“ **The doctors could not tell me anything about my future and I was just left to speculate** ”

Barry Sidaway

"I went to some of the meetings for people with Parkinson's and saw people in wheelchairs and after that I could not go. The future did not look rosy.

"The doctors could not tell me anything about my future and I was just left to speculate.

"I could not get any positive information, but I am a stubborn man and I tried to find out everything I could."

Barry determined to take each day step-by-step.

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He eliminated the things that aggravated his condition - such as eating protein during the day.

Changes

He had to give up his beloved rally driving and four years after diagnosis he stopped playing cricket, but not before scoring a century.

He went on to become managing director of his storage equipment company and now, 16 years later, is retired and living in Colchester.

Barry has now written a book about his experiences entitled 'The End of the Beginning,' which not only chronicles his own battles but is designed to give hope to the between 8,000 and 10,000 new cases of Parkinson's diagnosed annually in the UK.

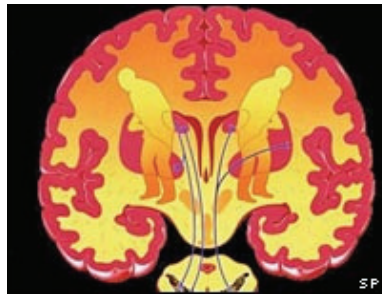
He hopes that by telling his story people will see that the diagnosis is not a death sentence.

"I want to tell people to take the word can't out of their dictionary.

"Do not fight it - you will be hitting a brick wall.

"Instead, continue to decide what you plan to do and accommodate the disease.

"Keep up enthusiasm for life, be realistic and aim to overcome obstacles, stay in control, be patient, celebrate each victory and do not panic.



An illustration of the brain depicting Parkinson's

"Find a regime that suits a lifestyle, not a lifestyle that suits a regime."

Future

Carl Clarke, reader in clinical neurology at the University of Birmingham said patients should understand the progression of the disease, and realise that it is not all bleak.

"It is important that people don't see a diagnosis of Parkinson's as the end," he said.

"Although Parkinson's is a progressive condition without a cure, symptoms often progress slowly and there are lots of treatments available which mean that people may continue to live with well-controlled symptoms for many years."

Hugo Middlemas, of the Parkinson's Disease Society, which will receive a donation out of the profits from the book, said: "It's fantastic that Barry has decided to share his story to raise money to help others living with the condition.

"Although everybody with Parkinson's is different, and his story is a personal one, I am sure that this book will motivate others who have been recently diagnosed to continue to lead an active life."

The book is published by AuthorHouse and costs £9.99.

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