

BM: CAN YOU TELL US A BIT MORE ABOUT THAT?

I remember it so well. It started in January 2020, I went out for a run, came home to shower and found a lump in my right breast. At the time I was on an interim assignment with London Borough of Camden, I rang them straight away and let them know I wouldn't be in work that week. After some tests with my GP I was diagnosed with breast cancer, it completely floored me. My treatment happened through Covid and lockdown which meant I had to shield throughout.

Camden were incredibly supportive, the Chief Executive Jenny Rowlands and Executive Director Martin Pratt both agreed that I would continue to work there and take time off around my treatment as needed. I was absolutely terrified I'd lose my assignment which was so important to me and for my mental health, I absolutely wanted to carry on working but I understood the organisation had their own needs and demands as well. I was really fortunate Camden were so flexible with me and I can't tell you how supported I felt throughout this, even as an interim. I'll always be grateful to Jenny and Martin for the compassion they showed me during such a difficult moment in my life.

Later on that year whilst still having treatment I went on to work for DHSC leading the Covid response in the West Midlands. It was tough and challenging but again the right thing for me as I like to be busy and feel like I'm making a difference. Clive Wright was another great support in this role.

This is my personal experience, but I completely recognise this will vary greatly from person to person – there's no one size fits all approach. I do believe it's important to be open and honest with your employers, manage their expectations about what time and energy you can commit. This applies to a health issue like I had but it could also be maternity leave, a bereavement or something else, I've learned that most people are supportive and will want to help you.

I spoke about finances before but it's worth reiterating. As a permanent member of staff you'll have access to benefits, sick leave and the support an organisation will provide and as an interim you don't. Make sure you prepare for the difficult times while you're working, set money aside and consider critical illness cover too.