

APS - A Family Affair

My mother has APS (antiphospholipid syndrome) and until recently it was thought also had lupus. Her father was also has APS. We suspect due to medical history his mother may have had APS but this is of course impossible to prove.

My mother's symptoms started when she was young as she had two miscarriages however, when she was around 40 and I was around 13, she had TIAs (Transient Ischaemic Attacks), a heart attack and other symptoms which meant I spent a lot of my time at home caring for her. Mum would care for grandad too both in this period and before she was ill, as grandad suffered from a series of strokes slowly reducing his mobility and communication skills. I was close to my grandad as he had also been a scientist, though that was more chemistry based, and even towards the end if you spoke to him about chemistry or science in general you could see his eyes spark up and his brain would begin ticking. We have been lucky in as much as mum's strokes have been TIAs and her heart attack was dealt with well. She still suffers from memory loss from the period of time she was ill (around 3 years), and her short

term memory can sometimes be a struggle for her, but in general her health is good, however, her condition has led to a few complications requiring surgery.

I suppose the most unique part of our story was when I came to choosing a PhD. I had worked for a year in Great Ormond Street Hospital in genetics but decided this was not for me and to look for a PhD, as it turned out Professor Anisur Rahman advertised at this time for a PhD working on a new potential treatment for APS. I applied and was awarded the position and thus spent the next four years designing, modifying and generating the new therapeutic. In the meantime mum has been more or less stable (being diagnosed with non-Hodgkins, a few bouts with ITP (Immune thrombocytopenic purpura) etc) and had a number of operations in that time, and I've had a fair few ups and downs in the lab regarding the project.

One of the more surprising outcomes, for me at least, has been how engaged mum has been in the project, offering her blood for testing, asking questions and understanding. We even attended a patient day run by APS Support UK together. Equally, it has been a great motivation for me to get past the issues we've had in the project as I can strongly relate this work to my family and specifically my mother and grandfather. It's led to me having a more patient driven outcome in my projects since.

Thomas McDonnell

Thomas is now a leading member of the group developing a potential treatment for the disease alongside Prof. Anisur Rahman at University College London and we thank him for kindly supplying this interesting article.