Hughes syndrome is a common but little known autoimmune disorder. One nurse is on a mission to educate people, reports Mary-Claire Mason

Hughes syndrome is easily diagnosed, as the antiphospholipid antibodies can be detected with a simple blood test.

A lupus nurse specialist, Ms Barwick says a large number of people contact her, anxious that they might have the condition. 'They want to know how to find out if they have it,' she says.

For the past five years Mr Barwick has worked as a part-time online nurse adviser for the Hughes Syndrome Foundation and the St Thomas' Lupus Trust, answering queries about these two conditions. Her involvement with autoimmune disease stretches back to 1987 when she started work at the lupus clinic in St Thomas' Hospital, London.

Ms Barwick gets several queries a week about Hughes syndrome and the number is growing all the time. Many are from newly diagnosed patients wanting reassurance and information about how to manage the condition and reduce their risk of developing clots.

'Finding out you have a chronic condition can be hugely depressing and stressful,' says Ms Barwick. 'I explain the things they need to know, for example that it is important not to smoke or to take hormone replacement therapy or the combined contraceptive pill, because all of these increase the risk of clots.

'I also discuss issues such as how to manage anti-clotting medication such as warfarin and how diet may affect it, and stress the importance of exercise for physical and mental health.

'My job is to support and inform people so they feel less isolated with this condition, which most people know little about.'

Mary-Claire Mason is a freelance writer

For further information go to www.hughes-syndrome.org.uk