

I STRUGGLED TO TOLERATE LIGHT, SOUND OR PEOPLE TALKING TO ME

ALEX DANSON-BENNETT

PATIENT STORY

Alex Danson-Bennett, Team GB Hockey Captain, injured herself on holiday and has been unable to play hockey since. Recently she has talked publicly about the impact of her mild traumatic brain injury on her life and career. "After the World Cup we had a bit of holiday time, so my boyfriend, Alex, and I booked a trip to Kenya. One evening we were out for dinner and there was a brick wall behind where I was sitting, about head height. I was leaning back with the back of my neck on the wall. Alex made a joke and, without thinking, I flung my head back and it hit the wall. Although I knew something wasn't right straight after the freak accident, I just tried to carry on and trained as if nothing had happened."

Despite knowing she wasn't completely well after cracking her head, Alex said she continued with the holiday and even went running. GB Hockey sent her to a concussion specialist in Birmingham for tests and she could hardly open her eyes. "I struggled to tolerate light, sound or people talking to me since hitting my head, I lived my life at a tenth of what I used to. It was hard, but I still believed I'd make a full recovery and hoped

to go back to playing for my country."

Despite being in pain Alex was determined to keep on pushing herself in training and continued to attend team events. Six weeks after returning home she persuaded the team doctor she was fit enough for a team-bonding away day pottery painting. Alex told BBC Sport:

"I went for an hour and all I remember was talking to my team-mate next to me and I lost the ability to speak. I just couldn't say any words. Obviously I was frightened but I didn't want to cause a scene so I went back to painting my egg cup. I went home as soon as that session was done. After getting home I felt violently sick and passed out. Knowing this was serious, I went to the hospital and suffered a seizure before being rushed for a CT scan. Nothing showed up on this scan or on an MRI or MRA scan. There's a theory that because I waited so long to have the scan, there may have been a bleed that was reabsorbed, which is why it didn't show up."

"One of the hardest parts in all of this, aside from the physical trauma, has been losing my identity. Going from leading my country,

aspiring to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics to just trying to get through a day. Head injuries are serious, debilitating and lonely. I hit my head one day and my whole life was pulled away from me."

Alex engaged in a full and active rehabilitation programme at Hobbs South East for specialist vestibular rehabilitation, where an interdisciplinary approach including physiotherapy, neuropsychology and a graded exercise programme tailored to functional retraining was targeted to Alex's skill set. Importantly, a big part of the Hobbs Vestibular and Balance Service is education and understanding of the symptoms, recognising the triggers early and on how to manage them so that Alex can effectively work towards returning to her usual activities as and when appropriate. She was guest speaker at a large conference hosted by Hobbs Rehabilitation where leading academics and clinicians explored and developed robust treatment pathways for better outcomes. Her testimony and experience helped to shape the current perspectives and future directions in the treatment of mild traumatic brain injury.



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