

Lupus affects people I love, and I want a cure

Jacquelyn Woods is down to 16 pills a day, and she's celebrating.

The 35-year-old hospitality sales professional was up to 27 pills a day at times. That total resulted from a doctor prescribing Woods 50 mg of a drug that no one could supply to her in a 50 mg tablet, so she had to take five pills at 10 mg each.

Woods' daily dosage arsenal includes steroids to help her immune system, drugs normally prescribed to transplant patients to prevent them from rejecting new organs, pain relievers for the constant joint pain and swelling she endures, migraine medication, and one drug specifically for the condition she has: lupus.

Lupus is a chronic autoimmune

disease that affects the body's ability to differentiate between its own healthy tissue and harmful invaders like viruses and bacteria. Instead of creating antibodies to protect the body against the harmful material, the immune system creates autoantibodies that attack healthy tissue.

If you've read this publication for a while, this will sound familiar to you.

Former Velocity staff writer Javacia Bowser also has lupus and wrote

about it in this space. I'm using my 600 or so words this week to raise awareness about the disease because people I love and care about have it, and I want to see them cured.

A cure for lupus is yet to be found and the disease's cause is unknown. Even treatments are limited; Woods is prescribed only one drug specifically for lupus in part because the Food and Drug Administration has approved only a handful of medications specifically for the disease. The wide array of treatment options but lack of specificity to lupus can lead to battles with insurance companies, Woods said. Imagine, for example, trying to explain to your HMO why you need a drug that's for epilepsy when you have symptoms of epilepsy but you actually have lupus.

According to the Lupus Foundation of America, more than 51 years have passed since the FDA approved a drug specifically for lupus. That's why LFA holds Walk for Lupus Now

events across the country to raise funds for research, education and support services for lupus patients.

LFA's Mid-South Chapter will hold Louisville's second annual Walk for Lupus Now fundraiser on Sept. 25 at E.P. "Tom" Sawyer State Park. Event coordinators hope to increase awareness about lupus and to raise at least \$50,000 for the cause. (For more info, go to WalkforLupusNow-Louisville.kintera.org.)

"We want everyone to be educated. The more we can educate people, the more likely we are to find a cure," said Woods.

Woods has been living with lupus for nearly 10 years. She was diagnosed at 26, when she found out she had systemic lupus erythematosus, a form of the disease that includes kidney inflammation among its most serious complications. Her kidneys were failing from a disease she knew nothing about.

Since then, Woods has learned a

lot about lupus and how to cope with the limitations it presents to a young woman. Prolonged exposure to the sun makes her physically ill, so beach vacations mean enjoying the sun in short intervals instead of lying out all day. And friends must understand her need to be in bed by 10 p.m.

But for the most part, living with lupus has been enlightening. She values life more, doesn't procrastinate as much and has become more appreciative of the medical field and of natural remedies, an appreciation that sprang a gardening hobby.

"Getting into the earth and seeing things grow, knowing that God has created that and the same kind of growth is happening in me makes it all a little easier to deal with." ♣

Mariam Williams is a Louisville native. More of her thoughts and stories can be found at RedboneAfropuff.com.



MARIAM WILLIAMS