# Glimpse into defining ourselves through illness

I read some advice recently about not letting your illness define you. This initially sounded logical, and quite a basic instinct. However upon mulling it over, I started questioning the feasibility of this concept, when you are deep in the throws of a chronic condition.

If being defined means to describe the nature or basic qualities of oneself, then surely it is hard to avoid seeing the limitations caused by an illness as part of you. If you can not work or socialise, then your career choice or weekend activities no longer currently describe you. If you were once vivacious, hard working and active for example, those characteristics are now a memory, and you have to accept where you are now to be able to heal and find a new, healthier you.

There are also good traits caused by being unwell that you can also see as now defining you. New found inner strength, positivity and the headstrong attitude that keeps us going. These may have been present in a lesser form when you were well, or barely at all, but when you are unwell for a long time, you are forced to find an inner reserve. You may also reassess what and who is really important to you; what you want to do with your life. You may find new skills and interests that you may not have, had you continued barrelling along your previous path.

I think that we definitely can not think that being unwell is the only thing about us. This puts us in danger of never finding the motivation or strength to get well. It also puts us at risk of wasting our precious minutes, instead of living as much of life as physically possible. I hate being unwell,

and I can’t imagine one person with a chronic illness who would prefer to stay unwell. It is overwhelming when your life is filled with doctor visits, tests, feeling unwell, resting, constant questions about your health, and reading countless relevant articles and personal accounts. It is hard not to feel like the only thing happening is your illness. It is important that we do not give into the illness, and let it dominate our lives; be the only thing we do or respond to.

However,  I can see the inner strength that I am gaining, and the change in my life path it has caused, and so I can see that this illness can be a positive turning point in my life, once I am well. It is part of me, and always will be, as horrible and frustrating as it has been.

I think we should look for the positives caused by our illness and let them form part of our new self definition, and acknowledge the negatives as lessons to better ourselves on the road to health. Maybe instead of focusing on not letting our illness define us, we should look at letting our illness strengthen and improve us.