



My Mental Health Story

Written by Kerry Blackburn

In 2019, I was diagnosed with Hashimoto's Thyroiditis, which is an auto-immune disease. Soon followed the diagnosis of several other auto-immune diseases: Lupus, Sjogren's, Raynaud's, RA, and a gluten intolerance. I was also diagnosed with Fibromyalgia at the end of 2021. My mental health started really going downhill when I was diagnosed with Lupus in 2019 (shortly after the Hashimoto's diagnosis). I fought the flares, the pain, and the headaches while remembering to take my medicine. I had a new normal to get used to. I currently take 14 different medications throughout the day.

I had COVID-19 in March of 2020 with double pneumonia (I also had it in 2021 but not nearly as badly). Thankfully, I was able to treat it at home. I hated being home all the time. I knew I needed to be on medication for my depression from all the auto-immune and health issues that had been thrown my way plus the stress of the pandemic. It was hard to admit that I needed help.

In 2022, I was faced with a whole other set of health conditions that really tested my mental health. In January 2022, I woke up with what I believed to be a migraine. I dealt with a constant headache and shooting pains on the left side of my head for months. I finally saw my doctor. Fast forward a few months, and I was sent to a neurologist when the headache did not go away. It turned out to be a condition called Occipital Neuralgia. The neurologist said it was treatable, but the treatments were not working. All of this took a huge toll on my mental health. I cried almost daily. I was in so much pain that I could not think straight, and I slept all the time. I was also put on more medications to help the pain. What is one more pill, right?

Finally, after several medications and nerve blockers, the neurologist believed there was an underlying condition and ordered an MRI. The MRI showed two bulges in my neck along with a bone

spur and spinal stenosis. I had to have two surgeries. The first one was in August to correct a TMJ issue that was caused by the tight muscles in my neck and jaw, and the second one was in November to fix the bulging discs.

I remember on the day after my neck surgery, the doctor came into my hospital room and asked me how I was. The first words out of my mouth were, "My headache is gone. IT IS FINALLY GONE." I cried. I thought I was going to have to live with that pain forever.

As a mom and wife, I thought I could just handle it on my own. I formed coping skills, started on medication, and learned when to take time for myself when I needed a mental health day.

Today, I take medication and see a therapist to help me deal with the mental stress of working full-time, going to school full-time, dealing with all the medications and health conditions I face, and the stigma of taking medication for anxiety and depression.

If I had to give one piece of advice to someone struggling, it would be, "It is ok to not be ok. There is no shame in needing help and asking for help."

It took me a while to learn that.



Kerry Blackburn works for Hall Estill as a family law paralegal. She began her legal career in 2009 as a receptionist and worked her way up to legal assistant in 2011. She received her associates in paralegal studies from Rose State in 2016. She has been a member of the Central Oklahoma Association of Legal Assistants since 2016 and served on the Board as the NALA Liaison from 2017-2020. She has been President since 2021. She is a member of the Oklahoma Paralegal Association and NALA. She is attending Oklahoma State University for her Bachelor's in multidisciplinary studies with a focus in prelaw. She plans to attend Oklahoma City University for her master's in legal studies. ✉ kerrycoalaokc@gmail.com