

Chronic illness and pain in the media

Horizon's recent programme 'Secret World of Pain' was an interesting combination of different facets of our understanding of pain: from genetic aspects to psychological. Some new treatments were explored, such as transcranial magnetic stimulation, which shows some positive results although it is extremely early days to say whether it will be beneficial to many people with chronic pain. You can find the programme to download at

http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00ybvz6/Horizon_20102011_The_Secret_World_of_Pain/

Style magazine yesterday (Sunday 6th Feb) carried an article about Sarah Manguso ("What it feels like to lose your youth to chronic illness"), who was struck down with an autoimmune condition in her twenties. She has written a book "The Two Kinds of Decay" (published by Granta) on her experiences. Some parts of the article struck a chord:

"There's this idea of the sick person being brave or heroic, and it's not always true. You're the same person, just sick. I was susceptible to all those beliefs, though. "This is going to make me wise and more patient," I thought, but in fact it only made me angry." "I have a close family and my parents were my greatest support. It was only afterwards that I saw how they'd suffered. ..But you can't predict which of your friends will be able to go with you to this new reality. Some of my closest friends had the hardest time."

"Slowly though, my perception shifted. I realized that I wasn't taking time off from some parallel normal life. Instead, I began to see that my years of ill health were my real life, and I could still learn and grow."

After many years of depression and difficulty in dealing with an unpredictable disease that tended to wax and wane without warning,

Manguso has since married but after 11 years of remission, her condition has returned. She remarks, "It was deeply frustrating and upsetting, but my new-found stability helped me to weather the storm."

Chronic Illness

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