# Phillipa Baines creates the Painathon campaign to highlight overlooked women’s health issues



Phillipa Baines, creative at Fold7, has shared her deeply personal health journey that inspired the creation of The Painathon campaign, a significant initiative launched to coincide with the 2025 London Marathon, aimed at shedding light on often overlooked women’s health issues.

Baines’ story begins in September 2022, when a routine bout of thrush — a common infection affecting 75% of women — spiralled into a prolonged and painful health struggle. Despite over-the-counter treatments, Baines experienced drug-resistant thrush, leading to persistent pain in the vaginal vestibule, an area rich in nerve endings and highly sensitive. After nearly two years marked by 26 doctor visits, two misdiagnoses, and £4,000 spent on private healthcare to avoid long NHS waits, she was diagnosed with vulvodynia, a chronic pain condition affecting the vulvar area. This condition, affecting up to one in four women during their lifetime according to NHS data from 2018, lacks a definitive cure and comprehensive treatment options.

Throughout her journey, Baines encountered medical gaslighting and a lack of empathy from healthcare providers, an experience she described as the ‘trust gap,’ where patient symptoms are often dismissed or downplayed by medical professionals. This prolonged period of suffering led her to moments of despair, including contemplating assisted dying, before finding hope through an Instagram connection with Monica Thomas, founder of Women’s Health Hope, a charity supporting those with female health conditions.

Inspired by her own experience and recognising the protracted NHS waiting times for women’s health issues, Baines and creative partner Dan conceptualised The Painathon campaign. The campaign draws a parallel between the endurance required in a marathon and the long wait times women face for diagnosis and treatment, visually represented through marathon bibs highlighting individual stories. These include conditions such as endometriosis, adenomyosis, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), fibroids, and many others, with some women reporting waits of up to 22 years for diagnosis.

The campaign also honours personal tragedies linked to these conditions, such as the story of Freya, who died from thoracic endometriosis after multiple collapsed lung episodes, highlighting the severe consequences of delayed diagnosis and treatment. The Painathon campaign underscores that conditions like endometriosis can be debilitating, affecting women’s ability to work and function in daily life.

Baines credits the campaign with renewing her faith in the power of advertising to effect positive change and provide hope. She expressed gratitude towards Fold7 for supporting the campaign and the broader movement recognising the gender pain gap, pointing to the influential work of brands like Bodyform, Libresse, and Nurofen in this space.

The Painathon campaign involved contributors who themselves suffered from various female health conditions, lending authenticity and urgency to the message. Baines hopes the campaign helps foster greater awareness and advocacy, aiming for a future where conditions such as endometriosis have cures, and vulvodynia and other disorders receive preventive and effective care.

Baines emphasised the importance of solidarity in women’s health, stating, "I hope women reading this know that if you’re battling a hidden health condition, you’re not alone. You don’t have to be ashamed or stay silent. And thank you to the men supporting women through these battles. It’s depressing, but your voices advocating for us can sometimes be more powerful than our own. So keep shouting."

Her campaign's visual elements include portraits of women suffering chronic pain, social media engagement, and prominent displays along the London Marathon route, reflecting the campaign's reach and impact. The Painathon has become a meaningful example of how creativity and personal experience can intersect to drive awareness on critical health issues.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vulvodynia/> - This NHS page provides information on vulvodynia, a chronic pain condition affecting the vulvar area, which aligns with the article's mention of Baines' diagnosis after a prolonged health struggle.
2. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vulvodynia/#prevalence> - This section of the NHS page discusses the prevalence of vulvodynia, noting that it affects up to one in four women during their lifetime, supporting the article's claim about the condition's prevalence.
3. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3779055/> - This study reports that vulvodynia is common, with a prevalence of 8.3% among women in southeast Michigan, corroborating the article's statement about the widespread nature of the condition.
4. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3779055/#prevalence> - This section of the study provides detailed prevalence data on vulvodynia, supporting the article's mention of the condition affecting a significant number of women.
5. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3779055/#diagnosis> - This part of the study discusses the challenges in diagnosing vulvodynia, highlighting the underdiagnosis and misdiagnosis issues mentioned in the article.
6. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3779055/#treatment> - This section addresses the treatment options for vulvodynia, noting the lack of a definitive cure and comprehensive treatment options, as mentioned in the article.
7. <https://www.thedrum.com/opinion/2025/04/29/how-my-burning-genitals-helped-inspire-the-london-painathon> - Please view link - unable to able to access data