# Fold7’s The Painathon campaign highlights hidden female pain during London Marathon



In a compelling new campaign coinciding with the London Marathon, Fold7 creative Phillipa Baines and her team have spotlighted often hidden female pain through the initiative known as The Painathon. The campaign, launched in February 2025, was inspired by Phillipa's personal health struggles, particularly her battle with vulvodynia, a chronic pain condition affecting the vulvar area.

Phillipa’s journey began in September 2022 when a bout of drug-resistant thrush, a common vaginal infection, led to months of discomfort and multiple treatments. Despite thrush affecting around 75% of women, in her case it became severe and persistent, culminating in nerve damage to the vestibule—the entrance area to the vagina, known for its sensitivity due to the dense concentration of nerve endings. Over nearly two years, Phillipa attended 26 doctor’s appointments, experienced two misdiagnoses, and spent £4,000 on private medical care to seek relief. Ultimately, she was diagnosed with vulvodynia, a condition with no known definitive cure and challenging treatment options.

Phillipa revealed that the road to diagnosis was marked by medical gaslighting and a lack of adequate support both in the NHS and private healthcare systems. She described a sense of “clinical indifference” and “compassion fatigue” among healthcare providers, despite vulvodynia affecting up to one in four women at some point in their lives, according to the NHS in 2018. Her experience sheds light on a wider healthcare issue concerning women's health, where conditions are often deprioritized or misunderstood, leading to long wait times and insufficient treatment options.

The Painathon campaign emerged from a personal connection Phillipa made with Monica Thomas, founder of the charity Women’s Health Hope. After joining an in-person support group in Ipswich, Phillipa and her creative partner Dan sought ways to help raise awareness. They used the visual motif of marathon bibs to symbolise the arduous and lengthy ‘race’ many women endure waiting for diagnosis and treatment, with some wait times extending to decades. Contributions from women with various conditions such as endometriosis, adenomyosis, PCOS, fibroids, PMDD, lichen sclerosis, and ovarian cysts were central to the campaign, intensifying the message around the urgency and severity of women's health conditions.

Among the stories highlighted was that of a woman named Chloe, who shared the tragic loss of her sister Freya to thoracic endometriosis after suffering numerous collapsed lung episodes. The campaign also highlighted the disabling impact of these conditions on daily life, including challenges in maintaining employment due to chronic pain.

Phillipa openly discussed the emotional and physical toll her condition imposed, recounting episodes of excruciating neuropathic pain that forced her to take time off work and seek relief in isolation. However, she also noted improvements in her condition after finding a supportive gynaecologist and managing to calm her nerve pain somewhat.

The campaign not only reinstated Phillipa’s faith in the power of advertising but also underlined its potential as a force for positive change, offering hope and fuelling advocacy. She thanked Fold7 for backing the idea and supporting her through her health journey, and emphasised the importance of continuing to raise awareness and advocate for better healthcare provisions in the field of women's reproductive health.

The Painathon campaign follows impactful work by brands like Bodyform, Libresse, and Nurofen in addressing the gender pain gap. Phillipa expressed hope that this campaign would contribute to a broader industry movement tackling these critical health issues and looking forward to a future where conditions like endometriosis and vulvodynia have effective cures and treatments.

Photographs accompanying the campaign reveal a collective of women affected by various health conditions, participants in social media awareness efforts, campaign visuals displayed along the London Marathon route, and Phillipa’s involvement in a Women’s Health Hope support group where participants visually expressed their experiences.

Phillipa Baines can be contacted via LinkedIn for those interested in learning more or engaging with the campaign’s ongoing advocacy efforts. The Drum is reporting on this initiative and contributing opinion pieces that further explore women’s health and advertising’s role in social change.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.nva.org/media-center/> - This page from the National Vulvodynia Association provides comprehensive information about vulvodynia, including its prevalence and impact on women's health, supporting the article's mention of vulvodynia affecting up to one in four women at some point in their lives.
2. <https://www.nva.org/news/press_releases07/> - This press release discusses a study indicating that approximately 16% of women may have suffered from chronic vulvar pain during their lifetime, aligning with the article's reference to the prevalence of vulvodynia.
3. <https://www.ndph.ox.ac.uk/publications/31918> - This study from the Nuffield Department of Population Health reports a 24% three-month prevalence of chronic pelvic pain among women aged 18 to 49, supporting the article's discussion on the widespread nature of women's health issues.
4. <https://obgyn.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1471-0528.1998.tb09357.x> - This systematic review estimates the prevalence of chronic pelvic pain in women in the UK, providing context to the article's mention of healthcare challenges in addressing women's health conditions.
5. <https://www.nva.org/news/press_releases07/> - This press release highlights the significant underestimation of chronic vulvar pain prevalence, supporting the article's point about the lack of adequate support and recognition of women's health issues.
6. <https://www.nva.org/media-center/> - This page from the National Vulvodynia Association offers resources and information on vulvodynia, corroborating the article's mention of the Painathon campaign's focus on raising awareness for women's health conditions.
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