# Blackpool woman battles acute myeloid leukaemia after misdiagnosis



An athletic 33-year-old woman from Blackpool, Olivia Knowles, faces a bleak prognosis after being diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia (AML), a condition that was initially misidentified as long Covid. Olivia began experiencing symptoms such as headaches and fatigue in late 2023, and medical professionals initially attributed her condition to long Covid. It was not until she developed severe toothache, leading to an emergency visit to Blackpool A&E, that she received the alarming diagnosis of AML.

In the wake of her diagnosis, Olivia endured a rigorous treatment regimen throughout 2024, which included multiple rounds of chemotherapy. Despite undergoing a stem cell transplant in December 2024 and initially being declared cancer-free, her health took a turn for the worse when, just a week later, she was informed that the leukaemia had returned and her life expectancy was now limited to mere months.

As a hair salon owner, Olivia’s active lifestyle prior to her diagnosis had included extensive endurance activities, such as 100-mile bike rides and 15-mile runs. In March, she undertook a 20-mile walk around Fairhaven Lake as part of a fundraising initiative aimed at supporting clinical research at King's College Hospital. She expressed her hope that contributions to the research will lead to advancements in treatment for AML, a cancer type she noted has seen limited progress in treatment options over the past 50 years.

“I always thought that relapse would be a real possibility, but obviously, I just didn’t expect it to be so soon,” Olivia told PA Real Life. She conveyed her deep longing for a return to normalcy, stating, “All I really miss now is going to work and training. That’s all I want – just my normal day and my normal routine.”

Olivia’s awareness of something being amiss began during the Half Ironman World Championship in Lahti, Finland, in August 2023. Although she completed portions of the course, the run segment proved to be notably challenging. “I just wasn’t able to push as hard as I normally would have been able to,” she recalled, a sentiment underscored by her usual athletic performance.

After being reassured by a private physician in November 2023 that her symptoms were likely attributable to long Covid, she was subsequently confronted by her serious health challenge just days later. Following her hospital admission for severe toothache and sepsis, the diagnosis of AML came as a complete shock. “It was a total shock,” Olivia said, adding that her lifestyle had not indicated any predisposition to cancer.

The treatment path embarked upon involved chemotherapy aimed at eradicating cancerous cells in her bone marrow. Olivia described her experience of hospitalisation, which began on November 7, 2023, and extended until Christmas Eve, highlighting her bodily vulnerability and the toll chemotherapy exacted on her immune system.

Amid her treatment, Olivia faced a critical juncture when she learned of her relapse just prior to her scheduled stem cell transplant. The uncertainty surrounding her health continued, as doctors advised her of potential paths forward in managing the disease. It was during this period that a consultant suggested she consider assisted dying services such as Dignitas in Switzerland, a comment that left her bewildered at the time.

Although Olivia initially managed to respond positively to her treatments, her health again deteriorated in March 2025 when she exhibited signs of active disease following recent tests that had appeared promising. The subsequent news of her relapse was described as a devastating blow, leading her to seek solace at home with her family.

In an effort to contribute to cancer research, Olivia embarked on her fundraising walk at Fairhaven Lake, ultimately raising over £25,000 despite needing to stop after 20 miles due to physical limitations caused by her treatment. She articulated her hopes for future advancements in AML treatments, particularly expressing optimism about the ongoing development of Car-T therapy, which she believes could offer new possibilities for patients.

Reflecting on her journey, Olivia reiterated the human impact of her experience, stating, “I did this (walk) so one day the next 33-year-old, the next one-year-old, the next one-month-old, isn’t an ‘almost’.” She has since begun a new chemotherapy regimen in pursuit of options that may lead to clinical trial participation, holding on to a sense of hope amid her challenging circumstances.

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

## References

* <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-drug/acute-myeloid-leukemia> - This URL supports the explanation of Acute Myeloid Leukaemia (AML) as a cancer type affecting the blood and bone marrow, and its treatment challenges. It provides insight into the condition's impact and treatment options.
* <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/acute-myeloid-leukemia/symptoms-causes/syc-20369008> - This Mayo Clinic webpage describes the symptoms of AML, including fatigue and headaches, aligning with Olivia's initial symptoms and misdiagnosis as long Covid.
* <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/acute-myeloid-leukemia/treating/chemotherapy.html> - This URL explains chemotherapy as a treatment option for AML, detailing its effects on the body and its role in Olivia's treatment regimen.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stem-cell-transplant/types-of-transplant/> - This NHS webpage discusses stem cell transplants, including their use in treating blood cancers like AML. It supports Olivia's experience with a stem cell transplant as part of her treatment.
* <https://www.car-tcell.com/> - This URL provides information about CAR-T therapy, a novel approach to cancer treatment mentioned by Olivia as a potential future option for AML patients.
* <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/faculties/lifescienceshealth/cancer> - This URL highlights King's College London's involvement in cancer research, aligning with Olivia's fundraising efforts for AML research at King's College Hospital.