# BBC series highlights critical state of neurosurgery waiting list in Wales



The BBC series *Saving Lives in Cardiff* has highlighted the critical state of the neurosurgery waiting list at the University Hospital of Wales, which currently includes approximately 270 individuals in need of urgent care. Among those waiting, the case of 27-year-old Courtney stands out due to the severity of her medical conditions. Courtney is battling a rare brain condition known as Chiari Malformation, compounded by her diagnosis of multiple sclerosis, both of which necessitated immediate surgical intervention to prevent potential paralysis of her lower limbs.

Chiari Malformation occurs when the brain extends into the spinal canal, and in Courtney's case, this was causing debilitating symptoms, including increasing numbness in her legs and feet. The surgery involved removing part of her skull and a small section of her brain to alleviate pressure on her spinal cord.

Courtney first began to experience symptoms of her condition approximately 18 months prior to her surgery. In an interview with *Wales Online*, she recounted, “I had numbness in my feet but it was getting worse and sort of travelling up through my calf and everything, so I went to the doctors and they got me in straight away and they did an MRI. My brain is essentially too big for my skull so it's going into my spinal cord.” The diagnosis of multiple sclerosis, which affects the central nervous system, was a significant turning point for her, particularly as she was contemplating starting a family at the time.

Courtney described the emotional impact of her diagnosis, stating, “I got up one morning and I couldn’t get out of bed, I had severe vertigo to the point where if I lifted my head I was being sick. I was admitted into hospital where they said it was multiple sclerosis, which was a huge shock. I burst into tears, my world just crumbled.”

Adding to her challenges, Courtney expressed that her condition made her family planning complicated and potentially dangerous. “At this part of my life we wanted to start trying for a baby or be pregnant at this point, but if I were to get pregnant now that would be a massive pressure on my spinal cord on top of everything that is already happening," she said. “I would just be risking my life and the baby’s life.” Her husband, Chris, echoed this sentiment, indicating they would not take unnecessary risks regarding her health.

Courtney's surgery was performed by neurosurgeon Dr Ravi Nannapaneni, one of 13 consultants at the hospital and noted for his intelligence as the Welsh regional officer for Mensa. In discussing Courtney’s case, Dr Nannapaneni remarked, “Courtney is rather unique, in the way that I’ve never seen this combination. For both conditions to exist at the same time, it's rare.”

The timing of the surgery was critical, as Courtney’s immuno-suppressive medications for multiple sclerosis presented additional challenges to wound healing. Dr Nannapaneni remarked, “So, it’s a small window to get her better. Waiting another six months, she is going to get that much worse; what function is lost never ever comes back.”

Despite the inherent risks associated with brain surgery, which included her expressing her fears about the procedure and even contemplating funeral arrangements, Courtney proceeded with the operation out of necessity. “Obviously, you’re opening up your brain, it’s terrifying. I’ve even told my husband what I want in my funeral,” she shared. Her husband remained supportive, assuring her, “I want her to have this operation to make sure she gets what she needs.”

Following a successful surgery and a four-day recovery period in the hospital, Courtney returned home, expressing optimism about her future. “It will be a long road, and I’m in pain, but I’m here I did it. I survived brain surgery, woo hoo,” she said in a positive reflection on her experience. Chris, filled with pride for his wife’s resilience, stated, “Every single day since the surgery, all I’ve said is, ‘I’m so proud of you’.”

Looking ahead, Courtney articulated a desire to focus on her recovery and everyday life, aiming to eventually plan for starting a family when her health allows. The series *Saving Lives Cardiff* airs on Wednesdays at 9pm on BBC Two and is also available on iPlayer.

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

## References

* <https://cavuhb.nhs.wales/news/latest-news/saving-lives-in-cardiff-watch-the-first-episode-on-20-august-on-bbc-one-wales/> - This article highlights the BBC series 'Saving Lives in Cardiff,' which showcases the critical state of neurosurgery waiting lists at the University Hospital of Wales, mirroring the urgent medical needs discussed in Courtney's case.
* <https://www.tvzoneuk.com/post/pr-savinglivesincardiff-bbc2s2> - This preview for Season 2 of 'Saving Lives in Cardiff' mentions the series' focus on the healthcare challenges in Cardiff, aligning with the complex medical conditions faced by patients like Courtney.
* <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/chiari-malformation/symptoms-causes/syc-20350069> - The Mayo Clinic provides detailed information on Chiari Malformation, which Courtney is diagnosed with, explaining how it occurs and its debilitating symptoms, supporting Courtney's experience with the condition.
* <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/multiple-sclerosis/symptoms-causes/syc-20350269> - This article from the Mayo Clinic explains the impact of multiple sclerosis on the central nervous system and its symptoms, aligning with Courtney's diagnosis and her emotional response to it.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m001wtk4/saving-lives-in-cardiff-series-2-episode-1> - The BBC iPlayer link provides access to the series 'Saving Lives in Cardiff,' which features real-life medical challenges similar to Courtney's situation, highlighting the urgency and complexity of surgeries in Cardiff hospitals.