# Phillipa Baines launches The Painathon campaign to highlight delays in women's gynaecological healthcare



Phillipa Baines, a creative at Fold7, has drawn on her personal health struggles to help create a powerful new campaign named "The Painathon," launched to coincide with the London Marathon in February 2025. The campaign aims to shine a light on the often-overlooked issue of female pain and the lengthy delays women face in accessing healthcare for chronic gynaecological conditions.

Baines’s journey began in September 2022, when she developed thrush after attending a series of social events. Thrush, a common fungal infection affecting about 75% of women, typically resolves with over-the-counter treatments. However, Baines experienced drug-resistant thrush that marked the start of a long and painful health battle. Despite multiple treatments and consultations, a burning pain in the vestibule — the entrance area to the vaginal canal — persisted.

After nearly two years involving 26 doctor’s visits, two misdiagnoses, and £4,000 spent on private healthcare, Baines was diagnosed with vulvodynia, a chronic nerve pain condition affecting the vulva. Vulvodynia is understood to affect up to one in four women during their lifetime, yet it remains little known within medical training and public awareness. Baines described her condition as a constant burning sensation, with flare-ups severe enough to affect other parts of her body. She recounted experiences of medical gaslighting and a ‘trust gap’ where her symptoms were initially dismissed or misunderstood by healthcare professionals both within the NHS and private sectors.

Baines’s lowest point came in late 2024, during which she contemplated extreme measures as she struggled with her condition. A turning point came from connecting with Monica Thomas, founder of the charity Women’s Health Hope, who provided crucial emotional support and a community of women facing similar challenges. After joining an in-person support group in Ipswich, Baines and her creative partner Dan began developing ideas to support the charity, eventually leading to the launch of The Painathon campaign.

The campaign uses the metaphor of a marathon bib to highlight the extensive waiting times women endure to receive diagnoses and treatment for gynaecological conditions. The campaign’s visuals feature participants all impacted by female health issues, reflecting a wide range of conditions such as endometriosis, adenomyosis, PCOS, fibroids, PMDD, lichen sclerosis, and ovarian cysts. One poignant story shared involved a woman named Chloe, whose sister Freya died from thoracic endometriosis after suffering multiple collapsed lung episodes.

The Painathon campaign emphasises how gynaecological issues have been deprioritised in healthcare, often treated as non-urgent despite their profound physical and emotional impacts. Conditions like endometriosis can be disabling, preventing women from maintaining employment due to constant or cyclical pain. Baines related her own experience of being unable to work during severe pain episodes, describing it as "neuropathic pain - like self-immolation."

Over the course of her health journey, Baines has experienced some improvement and now benefits from the care of a gynaecologist who supports her without causing additional distress. She credited the campaign for restoring her faith in the power of advertising to effect change, saying, "The Painathon restored my faith in advertising... It can offer hope. It can fuel change."

Baines also acknowledged the contributions of campaigns by brands such as Bodyform, Libresse, and Nurofen in raising awareness of the gender pain gap, and expressed hope that The Painathon would contribute to ongoing efforts towards improved healthcare for women. She envisages a future in which diseases like endometriosis have cures, and conditions such as vulvodynia, fibroids, PCOS, and lichen sclerosis receive effective preventive and therapeutic care.

The campaign was supported by Fold7 and involved individuals all personally affected by female health conditions. Baines highlighted the importance of support from both women and men in advocating for better recognition and treatment of these issues.

The Drum is reporting this detailed account of Phillipa Baines’s experience and the creation of The Painathon campaign, providing insight into the realities of women's health challenges and the impact of extended healthcare waiting times in the UK.

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

## Bibliography

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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