

Personal Statement for Jenny Versnel

I was diagnosed with asthma in my early twenties but in reality probably have had asthma all my life because of a history of cough from early childhood. This often prevented me from participating in sports until I was treated for asthma with inhaled corticosteroids.

I have known allergies to dust mite, grass, pollens and mould and am lactose intolerant. Whilst at university in South Africa I received immunotherapy which did much to alleviate symptoms but after moving back to the UK I had a couple of symptom free years before becoming sensitised to local allergens.

In early years I was well controlled on low dose inhaled corticosteroids but with time these have no longer been as effective and I now require higher doses of corticosteroids with the following being my normal medication:

- Inhaled corticosteroid
- Long acting beta-2 –agonist
- Montelukast
- Flixonase
- Zyzal
- Short acting bronchodilator

About twice a year I also require oral steroids due to an exacerbation normally triggered by a cold virus. At such times my asthma is difficult to get under control and sometimes means having to go to hospital. Until my asthma is brought under control I also have to increase my inhaled steroids significantly for a couple of months.

I have tried different types of inhalers – Flixotide, Seretide and Alvesco. With both Flixotide and Seretide I suffer from a very hoarse voice which has always been problematic with my job. Whilst I found it much easier to use Seretide in terms of only having to remember to take one inhaler, the side effect of a hoarse voice was still problematic. When Alvesco came onto the market I requested this product because it is only activated once inside the lungs and is known to have less side effects in terms of a hoarse voice. When I initially requested Alvesco my consultant refused as the 160 mcg would not be enough to control my asthma. However once things stabilised again I have moved to Alvesco and have found considerable benefits from not having a hoarse voice. I believe that choice is extremely important when it comes to types of inhalers as people do respond differently and the side effects differ in people. The only negative point for me now is having to take Serevent separately twice a day.

Apart from having a personal experience of asthma, I also have experience of hearing the views of people with asthma through my work as Executive Director of Research and Policy at Asthma UK. When Asthma UK recently ran focus groups on the choice agenda for the Department of Health people with asthma said that they wanted to have more information around the different asthma medications and choice when discussing the medicine they take for their asthma. People with asthma also felt that in the hospital setting they were often not given any choice around their asthma medication.

In summary I would like to have an informed discussion around my asthma medication with my doctor or consultant and would want choice around the type of medication weighing up what is most effective clinically against the side effects experienced.