

Medic to have lifesaving treatment after desperate appeal reaches target just in time

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By Tina Robins



Former army medic Katrina Brown has raised £110,000 for a life-saving operation.

FORMER military medic Katrina Brown heads to the USA for lifesaving treatment next week after an amazing £110,000 appeal finally reached its target with the help of Standard readers.

The 31-year-old from South Cerney went through a series of last minute disasters just the day before the deadline for the payment to be made to the hospital in Chicago where she will receive stem cell therapy for her systemic sclerosis.

But now she is packing and getting ready to fly out on Monday.

She said: "The only thing I'm worried about is because we've had so many hurdles I won't be able to relax until I'm in my hospital bed with a drip in my arm and the doctor stood beside me saying we're starting the treatment."

Friends, family and supporters from all over the country threw themselves into a desperate fundraising effort when she returned to the UK in October after tests in America revealed her heart had already been damaged by the condition and she

needed the procedure as soon as possible.

They had already raised £20,000 to pay for the week of tests, but on her return they were faced with the challenge of bringing in another £90,000.

Sponsored runs, stalls, concerts, a ball, fashion shows, a saucy calendar and a tea dance were among the events organised the length and breadth of the country.

Fellow wives and service folk at the Duke of Gloucester Barracks formed a committee to back the appeal with a series of fundraisers.

The Golden Cross in Cirencester also organised a live music night. In Wiltshire and there was a headshave at the Horse and Groom in Charlton and a 15 hour sponsored cycle ride in Swindon.

The day before the deadline to make the payment a final donation pushed the fund past the target.

But even then there were last minute difficulties. The nurse in Chicago who acts as a liaison with patients was on holiday and then Katrina and husband Martin were told one of their flights had been cancelled.

Even organising the transfer of the money from the UK to the US was traumatic and led to one of her supporters bursting into tears in the bank.

Finally the problems were sorted out and the couple were able to start packing in earnest.

A grateful Katrina said she had been stunned at the generosity of everyone who had played a part in saving her life.

"I keep thinking to myself that I should be getting worried, I should be getting scared. But it is still just excitement," said Katrina. "But I'm sure I will when I start feeling ill and my hair starts falling out."

She and Martin fly out on Monday, but once there she will wait for a few days to recover from the flight before she starts the treatment which involves gruelling chemotherapy to destroy her immune system before her own stem cells are injected to reboot it.

Without it her organs and muscles would continue to harden, eventually proving fatal.

"When I get there the tiredness and everything I've been through is probably going to hit me. I think I'm running on adrenaline and have been for the past few months," she explained.

When she returns in June she aims to get back to work as soon as possible and carry on helping others in a similar situation.