



When Work Is Slowly Killing You

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I recently read the article ["I Hid My Disability At Work For 6 Years. When I Stopped, My Entire Life Changed."](#) This sentence resonated with me the most. "But 'sucking it up' was slowly killing me."

I suffered from extreme recurring pain from endometriosis for the majority of my career in education. I was put on continuous birth control after removing it twice didn't work, and it came back with a vengeance each time.

Paul Wirth, who was my principal some years ago, changed my perspective. One day, we were standing in the hall talking and I somehow lost my balance and hit the wall. He said, "Shawnta, go home." I thought he was joking, but he wasn't. I explained how he needed me there to help

with the tasks we were working on together. He tapped his school ID that he was wearing and said, "I'm the principal. You are not well, and you need to take care of yourself."

I was pissed! I said to him and to the teacher who was walking down the hall that I was being forced to go home against my will. To prove him wrong, I went to one of those minute clinics. I learned I had a severe double ear infection (which is why I lost my balance), and I also had a sinus infection. It was recommended that I stay home the next day. Begrudgingly, I contacted him to tell him what I learned. He was cool and didn't make me feel bad for being sick or needing to stay home.

That incident made me think about my endometriosis and if there was more I could do besides being on continuous birth control. The birth control only kept the pain away some of the time. After talking with my doctor, I decided to have a uterine ablation. Still, I was nervous about taking the time off. I asked and he was okay with me being out. I had been so used to being told to take care of personal business during school breaks that it was refreshing to have a principal who didn't make me feel guilty for taking care of myself.

That procedure was a blessing because I learned that part of my pain was being caused by fibroids. I had them removed during the procedure. For a few years, I was pain-free for the first time ever in my career. It could have been like that sooner if I didn't have fear of pushback for taking care of myself.

In a few years, the pain was slowly coming back. At that point, my doctor agreed that a hysterectomy was the best way to go. I didn't get the hysterectomy until a couple of years after that conversation because I was in a different school and it was clear that this was frowned upon. I kept getting told to do it over the summer. I wanted to do it during the school year so my sons would be at school for most of the day while I was recovering. Instead, I suffered in silence. I sat in meetings where my pain level was at an 8 out of 10. In December 2020, I got a hysterectomy right before winter break. I was a school administrator at the time, and it seemed like no one wanted me to be gone for longer than needed.

After I had my surgery, my doctor went over pictures she took. I had, as she said, "a collection of fibroids," and on top of that my right fallopian tube was twisted around my uterus. I had to stay at the hospital overnight, and I kept thinking about those pictures. I kept thinking about how I suffered just to appease a boss. I said to myself no more. In education, we are big about accommodating students, but when teachers need accommodations and support, many times we are brushed off and told to figure it out on our own time during a break.

Say it with me. No more!

No more should we suffer in silence and ignore our health. No more will we serve a system to the detriment of ourselves, a system that many times shows us no love back. If we died tomorrow, they would post our job online before the close of business. Remember this before you suffer silently in pain.