

Chronic fatigue and pain illness under spotlight

By **JENNA PUDELEK**

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A SUFFERER of a chronic pain and fatigue condition from Kent has shared her story ahead of a national awareness drive.

An awareness week for the debilitating syndrome, Fibromyalgia, is being held from September 7.

The disorder can be brought on by physical and emotional trauma.

Sally Russell, who lives in Dartford, was diagnosed with Fibromyalgia two years ago, but believes it could have been triggered by a serious car accident she had when she was just 17.

The 58-year-old said: "I was thrown out of the car and landed on my back – I was very lucky to be alive.

"I think my problems could have started as far back as that."

The civil servant said she suffers from a tingling sensation in her hands and feet, but she also has arthritis which makes it even more painful to walk.

"Some days just to lift up my feet and walk on the pavement feels like a step too far," she said.

"For me it starts off worst in the morning and I really struggle to get out of bed. One of the things about the fatigue is that you do not sleep, you are always just dreaming and they [the dreams] can be quite upsetting."

Her doctor told her for years that the pain and fatigue were just "wear and tear" and getting older, she said.

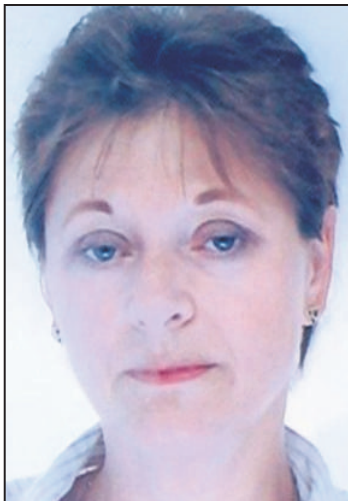
"It was so frustrating," said Mrs Russell. "One of the things they say is that, 'you look so well, how can you feel so bad?'. People expect more if you look well."

KOS Media received a flood of letters from readers last time we published a story about Fibromyalgia, from readers eager to find out more and welcoming the fact the syndrome had been highlighted.

Fibromyalgia is diagnosed if the patient has experienced widespread pain for more than three months, in at least 11 of the 18 specified tender points when pressed, the Fibromyalgia Association UK states.

Current treatment aims to ease the symptoms by reducing pain and increasing sleep, but there is not a cure for the condition itself.

Mrs Russell has tried various prescription drugs from her doctor but found that



RAISING AWARENESS: Sally Russell says many people suffer from Fibromyalgia for years without even knowing it

although antidepressants helped her sleep she felt even more tired throughout the day.

She said she has problems with her memory and worries about the long-term side effects of taking the pain relief drugs.

But she has managed to stay at work part-time with the condition.

She has also tried various alternative remedies. The hydrotherapy she receives at Darent Valley Hospital helps with pain and also found aromatherapy relaxing, she said.

"It is hard to diagnose and people have it for years. It is definitely important to raise awareness about the condition," Mrs Russell added.

More than 460 people across the county go to support groups in association with UK Fibromyalgia, a charity that supports people with the condition.

Mrs Russell goes to a support group in Medway run by Margaret Dobson.

• **For details of a Kent support group for Fibromyalgia call Mrs Dobson on 01634 865925.**

