

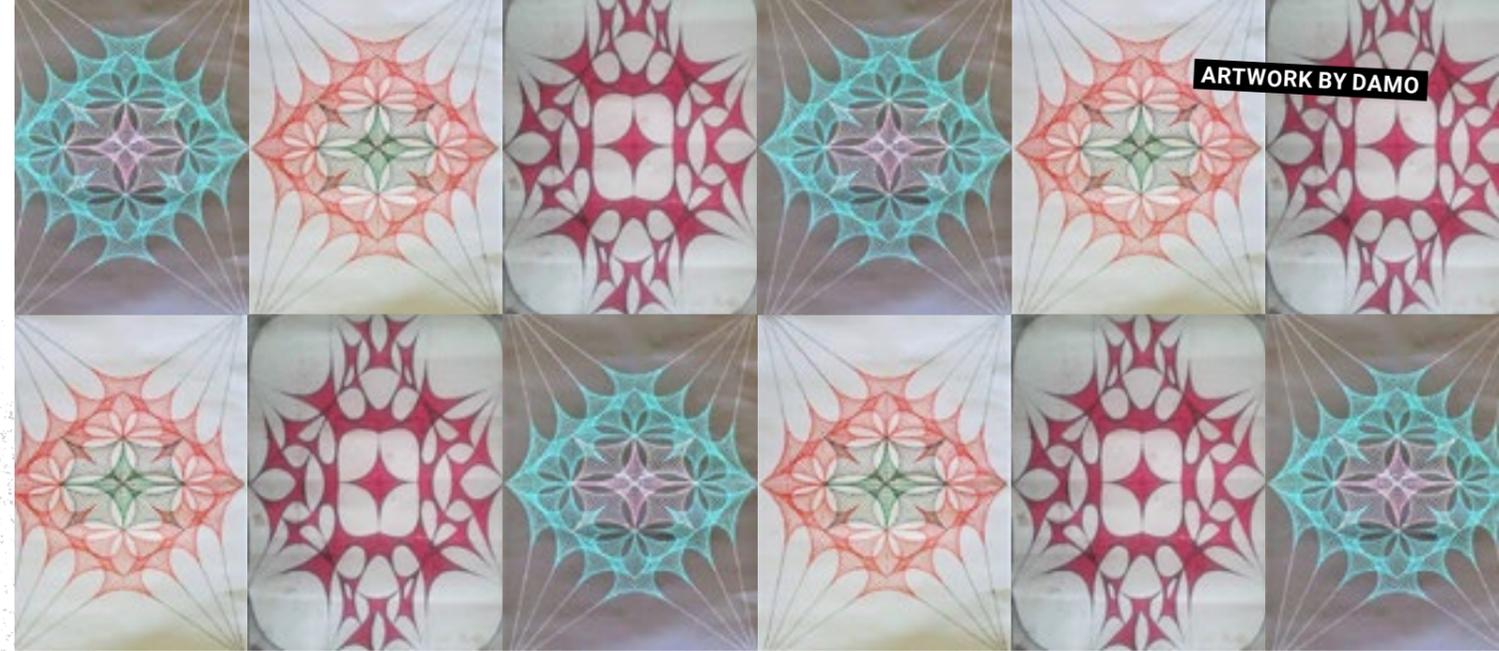
TRACKS

Illicit drug users magazine

**THE
HEALTH
ISSUE**



Issue 32



The TRACKS COMMITTEE's mission is to educate, support and empower people who choose to use or inject currently illicit and prescription substances.

With this goal in mind, the committee researches the latest information relevant to illicit and prescription drugs, their use and possible harms related to their use. In our quest to fulfil our mission we network closely with our sister organisations from other states, as well as with local relevant stakeholders. Often we will duplicate articles from these organisations and stakeholders and we are grateful for their generous sharing of information. All articles submitted to or accessed by the committee that make it to the final TRACKS draft will be credited to the author and their organisation. With thanks to our drug war allies, those who join forces to resist and reduce all harm associated with drugs and their use:

- QuIHN's brothers in arms, the Australian drug user organisation network.
- AIVL (Australian Injecting and Illicit drug user's League) peak national drug users organisation
- QuIVAA (Queensland Injectors Voice for Advocacy & Action)
- NUA (NSW Users and Aids Association)
- Peer-based Harm Reduction WA
- HRVIC (Harm Reduction Victoria)
- NTAHC (Northern Territory AIDS and Hepatitis Council)
- CAHMA (Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy)
- TUHSL (Tasmanian Users Health & Support League)
- CNP (Peer Projects – Hepatitis S.Aust)

Disclaimer: The distribution of this publication is targeted and not intended for general distribution. The contents of this magazine do not necessarily represent the views of QuIHN. Our articles aren't for every reader, sometimes the language may unintentionally offend. Please understand that some articles may include words that the TRACKS Committee members themselves are reluctant to print. When deciding whether to print or not to print, the committee's final decision rests with the author's intent.

QuIHN does not judge people who choose to use drugs illicitly, and TRACKS welcomes contributions which express opinions and raise issues of concern to drug users past, present, and potential. In light of current laws on self-administration of drugs, however, it should be clear that by publishing the contents of this magazine QuIHN does not encourage anyone to do anything illegal. While not intending to censor or change their meaning, TRACKS reserves the right to edit

articles for length, grammar, and clarity.

Information in this magazine cannot be guaranteed for accuracy by the editor, writers, or QuIHN. TRACKS takes no responsibility for any misfortunes which may result from any actions taken based on materials within its pages and does not indemnify readers against any harms incurred.

Tracks is a harm reduction / community magazine and, as such, we at QuIHN want your input. We know there is heaps of talent out there and great perspectives on some of the issues our community faces.

There has been fantastic submissions of art, poetry and other articles in the past, which we greatly appreciate but would love to have more pieces from our community to choose from. You can submit a contribution to TRACKS by getting in touch with your local QuIHN office, or by emailing quihn@quihn.org with 'TRACKS contribution' in the subject field. All contributions that are published receive a \$30 gift card.

One reader recently made a proposition worth printing:

"As a suggestion I can't help but observe tracks may appreciate an element of wry humour or some sort of attempt to replace the slapstick humour some of us hunger for now we don't see the old Oliver and Hardy or it's descendants on tele. Some skill and a sophisticated and developed understanding of what's required in tending to the healing properties of a belly laugh for your readership may be incredibly useful and in essence the longlost brother or spiritual sister reminder so many of us could do with. Or maybe that's just me. They're saying' to me,"Come on, bro'. Lighten up a bit, and this is the place and the time to remind us of it. So there we are. I've had my two bobs worth. I suggest you include this email as part of a worthwhile entry in your mag. Who knows. It may draw some unintended interest from a more peculiar source and come to something good. Here's hoping."

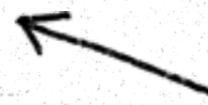
Other ways you can be involved with our larger community:

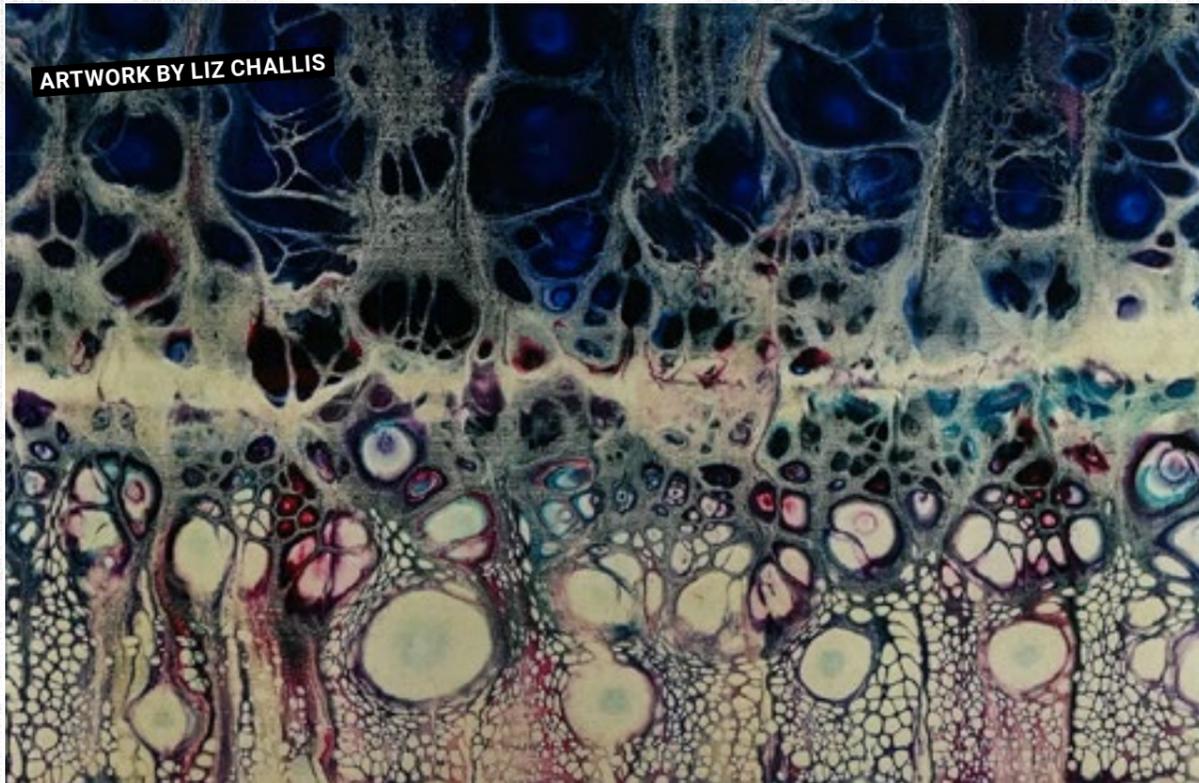
- Becoming a member of QuIVAA
- Like and/or follow QuIHN and QuIVAA facebook pages
- Keep an eye on job opportunities at QuIHN and QuIVAA
- Volunteering with QuIHN
- Join the AIVL (The Australian Injecting and Illicit drug users League) elist.

QuIHN acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and pays respect to Elders, past, present, and future. QuIHN also acknowledges and respects the continuation of Cultural, Spiritual, Educational and Health practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' strength, resilience, and capacity in response to the impacts of colonisation. QuIHN is committed to contributing to a reconciled Australia.

CONTENTS

- 8** Self-care
- 12** Don't You Dare Call Me Normal (meet our Brisbane client rep, Jenny)
- 14** No Rest for the Wicked 
- 16** Introducing the Kombi Clinic
- 18** Madam Alana 
- 20** Let's Destigmatise
- 25** Sex, Drugs, and Chinese Medicine 
- 30** Abscesses!?



Hello again Tracketeers; and a warm welcome to issue 32 of TRACKS Magazine – The Health Issue.

This issue of TRACKS will be released just in time for Christmas and the new year and to be honest, 2023 could not arrive any sooner! This past year was hectic and presented many challenges and changes to the world as we knew it and I for one, am incredibly grateful to be seeing the arse-end of 2022 and of course, covid 19 (byeeeee)!

We here at TRACKS thought it might be fitting to make this issue of the mag about health- more specifically, about the health of people who use drugs.

Throughout the issue you will find some tips on self-care, sleeping, acupuncture, how to identify and not get herpes and how to avoid getting a bone eating bacteria from a dirty shot. You will also discover poems, stories and artworks from our talented contributors (to whom we are always mega grateful). We encourage all of you to share or submit your stories and artworks with us (and we will offer you a voucher in return for your efforts). This magazine is written by people who use drugs, for people who use drugs – so, it's your mag and your contributions are what make it great and what keeps the magazine going.

And...speaking of the silly season, Christmas can be a tricky time for many people. Use safely, look after yourselves and your mates, stock up with extra equipment and naloxone and ultimately, be there for one another. And if someone invites you to Christmas lunch, jump on that shit – no one should be alone at Christmas. Be safe and be kind to each other and we'll see you in the new year.

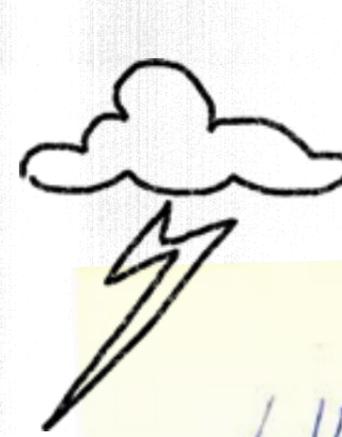
Love, The Tracks Committee

IN MEMORY

Sadly, on Aug 16th this year, we lost a beautiful soul - Liz Challis.

Liz was a QuIHN Representative for the Townsville office. Liz was dedicated to her work with us and fulfilled her role with compassion, wisdom and professionalism. It's difficult to describe Liz in only a few words because she had so many wonderful attributes – Liz was kind, staunch, patient, humble, friendly and had spunk and a beautiful aura about her. Liz was one of those people, who once you met her, you never forgot her. Liz was also a talented artist who was an incredibly dedicated and loving mother and family member. We treasured you here at QuIHN and we will miss you Lizzie!

The cover of Issue 32 of TRACKS is a painting by Liz Challis titled – 'Left and Right Brain'.

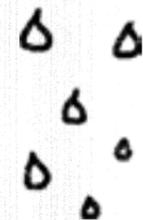
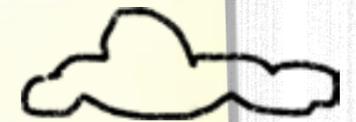


LIFE - isn't
about waiting for the
STORM to PASS.

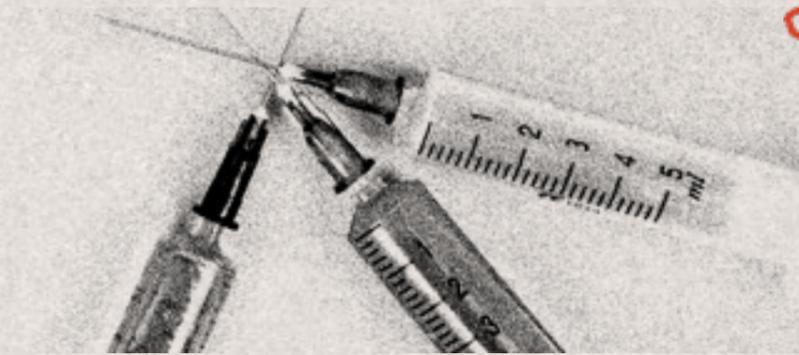


It's about learning
to DANCE in the RAIN

for "Tracks"
magazine



LOCAL & INTERNATIONAL DRUG NEWS



AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST METH BUST

In August this year, NSW police allegedly seized the largest meth haul in the nation's history. Shipments intercepted at NSW's Port Botany, contained several sea cargo containers that had sailed in from the UAE. Vice Magazine stated a whopping 1.8 tonnes of meth was seized equalling a street value of approximately 1.6 billion dollars. The meth was discovered concealed in palettes of marble stone slabs. So far, three men have been charged in relation to the bust.



THAILAND DECRIMINALISES WEED

In June this year, Thailand decriminalised weed nationally, (legalising cultivation and possession). However, don't book your flights yet- laws around the drug appear to be grey and addled with lots of conditions. Decriminalisation of weed in Thailand is not geared so much towards visitors, but more-so for residents of the country with the focus being more on medicinal and wellness. The Washington Post reports, edible products containing weed can be found at cafes and restaurants in Thailand but will contain no more than 0.2% of THC.

AUSSIES LIKE METH

And on that note, BBC news reported this year that Australia has the highest reported methamphetamine use per capita in the world, with about 6% of Australians - 1.2 million people - having used the drug. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-62683209>)



FENTANYL SEIZURE

11kg of fentanyl was seized earlier this year in Melbourne. To date, no one has been charged for the haul. The Guardian newspaper reported that a national wastewater drug monitoring report found fentanyl use in Australia was generally stable and on the lower side.

DRUG TESTING

In a first for Australia, Canberra has just launched a fixed pill testing site with a six-month pilot program. People attending the site can get further information on harm minimisation and health promotion, and/or free nurse-led health care including general health, sexual health, and mental health services and information. The service is open to anyone intending to use drugs who would like to know more about what's in them. The Guardian quoted Sione Crawford from Harm Reduction Victoria as stating, "People are going to continue dying from impure drugs...drug testing is...[another] tool...that can reduce overdoses."



ACT LEADING THE WAY IN DRUG DECRIMINALISATION

On the 21st of October this year, the ACT legislative assembly passed the Drugs of Dependence Bill 2022 - which will result in the decriminalisation of the possession of small amounts of illicit drugs including - heroin, cocaine, MDMA and methamphetamine. People found carrying small amounts of drugs will be fined but not charged with a criminal offence. However, the legislation will not be implemented for another 12 months - meaning, you can still be charged until then. Also, keep in mind, once the new law is in place, it's unlikely to apply to those caught with larger quantities. Chris Gough, Executive Director of CAHMA (Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy) stated. "At CAHMA we are very proud that once again the ACT finds itself leading the country in developing legislation that recognizes that drug use is a health and human rights issue.

Ideas for Self-Care

(n) doing things to take care of your body, mind, and emotions

Focus on Your Breathing

Do a Craft

Dance to Your Favorite Songs

Clean Up

Use Positive Self-Talk

Play a Game

Stop Your Negative Thoughts

Watch a Movie or a Show

Take a Nap

Go Outside in Nature

Read a Book

Hug a Loved One

Eat Healthy Foods

Listen to Music

Show Yourself Love

Go For a Walk

Be Grateful

Share Your Feelings

Have a "Me Day"

Have a Good Laugh

Cozy Up in Your Favorite Spot

Have a Good Conversation

Come Up With an Idea

Tell Yourself "Good Job!"

Call or Message a Loved One

Spend Time With Your Pet

Keep a Gratitude Journal

Be Hopeful

Create Something

Do Something Active

Do Yoga

Finish a Task



WHAT IS SELF-CARE?

Essentially, self-care is about looking after yourself as best you can. Self-care can be anything you do to stay physically, mentally, and emotionally on top of things. Whether you're aiming for nirvana or just trying to keep it together on a daily basis, remember to take care of yourself. Take some time out for you and press reset every now and then - in whatever way works best for you. Here are some tips we came up with for self-care -

1

Get Active - Exercise is a proven way to relieve stress, regulate moods and promote happiness. When we exercise, our bodies release endorphins, giving us a natural 'high' that make us feel good!



2

Write or draw - Starting a journal is a fantastic way to record and reflect on your feelings. If a journal doesn't sound like your kind of thing, sketchbooks, adult colouring books, and crossword puzzles are great for taking a break and engaging your brain.

3

Connect with others - Sometimes, all you need to decompress is to chat with someone.



4

Hone a skill or hobby - This might be a good time to revisit a hobby you may have put aside or perfect a skill you've been working at. Whether it's cooking, painting, playing an instrument, or even knitting, now is a good time to hop back in.



5

Practice micro self-care - While you may not have time to dedicate a full day to self-care, there are lots of smaller forms you can incorporate into your busy schedule. It might be cooking your favourite dish, listening to your favourite music or podcast, or watching your guilty pleasure TV show.



6

Have a decent sleep - don't underestimate the value of a lovely, long, deep sleep!



7

De-clutter something - Clean a room, desk, or shelf that you've been ignoring. Or simply get rid of five things you never use.

8

Be kind to yourself - Often when being compassionate towards others, we forget to be compassionate with ourselves.

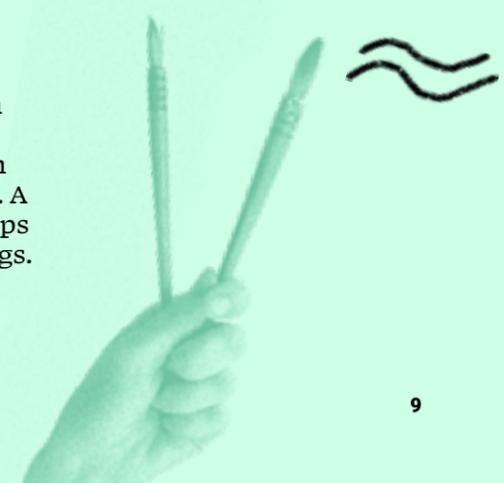


9

Practice mindfulness - Pay attention to what's happening in the moment and accept all the emotions that you are experiencing.

10

Avoid giving yourself a hard time - Often if you take a step towards fixing things, your head will leave you alone. But reach out if you need to, talk to a professional. A counsellor can provide you with some tips on how to manage your mind and feelings.



CRYSTAL DREAMS

I met the woman of my dreams
This Chrystal came across unseen
She took my whole entire day
She grabbed my soul and ran away

Come with me this ain't a task
I'll return your soul if you just ask
Your auras bright your spirits fast
Don't be afraid this time your last

Taken to a place unknown
Familiar faces to me were shown
Tormented souls stood all alone
And screamed my name then vanished below

Chrystal dreams why torture me
These souls are burnt my name they scream
Can't help them now their souls unseen
My auras bright my spirits free

Please take me back to physical form
Don't take me where these souls were born
She turned to me and said be warned
You too will die one day all torn

She took her time to send me back
To my body no longer trapped
Chrystal dreams then stayed with me
To catch my dreams she sleeps with me

I then woke up a moon-lit night
And Chrystal's sitting with delight
Back in my head is where she fled
To once again mess with my head

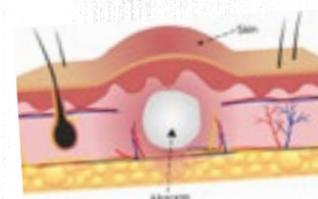
Come back with me it's time to show
That evil place that we all know
Those spirits scream they won't let go
But Chrystal dreams will tell them so

The nightmare ends when Chrystal screams
Each time I wake she comforts me
She blows my mind each time I see
That chainsaw drug Chrystal and me

*Written by Wayne Ingle
(about methamphetamines)*

Wayne is a proud Kamilaroi boy (NSW)

ABCESSES



What is an abscess?

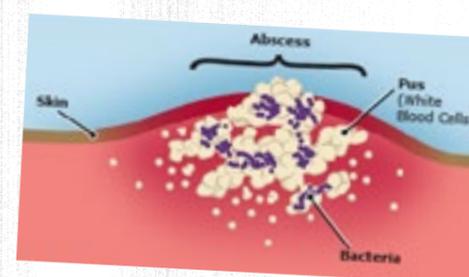
An abscess is a localised bacterial infection that may be caused by unsafe injecting practices. It is a collection of pus that will appear as a tender, red mass or lump on your skin. An abscess will be hot and sensitive to the touch.

How do abscesses form & how can I avoid getting one?

When your white blood cells attack bacteria, some skin & muscle can die, creating a hole. This then fills with pus, forming an abscess. You can reduce your risk of getting an abscess by following safer injecting practices... including the following:

- Always washing your hands before, during & after preparing a mix or injecting
- Always using clean equipment, including fits, spoons, tourni's etc
- Swabbing skin, equipment & location where you are mixing up
- Filtering your mix

What to do if you think you have an abscess



Abscesses should be treated seriously & swiftly. Go to a doctor or clinic as soon as possible. Abscesses usually need to be treated with antibiotics to clear the infection and the pus may need to be drained (lanced). Avoid attempting to drain the abscess yourself by squeezing or pressing on it – this can spread the infection. Do not stick a needle or other sharp instrument into the abscess – doing so could/may injure the blood vessels under your skin or cause the infection to spread. Avoid injecting near or around the infected area whilst you have an abscess.

Can an abscess cause serious harm?

In a nutshell – yes! Infection from an abscess can spread quickly and without appropriate antibiotic treatment, could lead to septicaemia (blood poisoning). If you have an abscess and experience; a temperature over 38 degrees, chills/sweats, extreme pain at the abscess site, dizziness, passing out or confusion – please seek immediate assistance or get to a clinic or hospital immediately.

DON'T YOU DARE CALL ME "NORMAL"

"My role as Client Representative has been to try to represent my kinda people ... People who have experienced homelessness, alienation from family, community, culture."

Introducing Jenny Z, QuIHN Bowen Hill's client representative.

I first came into contact with QuIHN seeking better services for my opioid replacement program and mental health issues. See, it's never been simple or easy for me. I had more than just an addiction issue, I had underlying trauma issues, family issues, mental health issues, other health issues. I was a mother to 3 kids. I had lost custody of 2 out of 3 of my kids to my mother. My son's father had died and I was just at a loss as to how to move forward.

Most of my intimate relationships at this point turned toxic or abusive and my general health and mental health were not the best either.

I started do Mud Maps and connected with other people going through similar stuff. I learnt a lot about harm minimisation practices and coping strategies. I got acupunctured regularly and found out about other services to get linked into.

About 4.5 years ago I finished opioid replacement but I did not do rehab. I still attend counselling in QuIHN and see Quihn for my mental and general health. I get lots of parenting tips from the doctors too. Now my son is 20 and my non-custodial daughters are older. One of those girls has now had a child of her own, so I am a grandma.

So that is kinda my story. My role as Client Representative has been to try to represent my kinda people – people with issues. People who

are addicted and people who choose to use recreationally. People who have experienced homelessness, alienation from family, community, culture. People who struggle to do the stuff 'normal' people take for granted. Holding down jobs, turning up to appointments, even having the desire or ability to stand up for themselves.

Today, I can do most of that either with support or on my own. But it absolutely has not always been that way.

Being a client rep, I have sat in the interviews to hire QuIHN staff. I have listened to policy and administrative matters and tried to represent myself as I am now, a little further down my healing path, but also as I was when I was most vulnerable and messed up and desperate.

I am so blessed to get access to QuIHN's staff training porthole and watched endless educational stuff on the nature of addiction trauma and services that try to help users and those who are just like I was and could be again. Please don't get me wrong. I am still addicted to ciggies and caffeine, but I no longer drink or do drugs. I still take mental health meds and attend therapy. So my healing journey goes on. I just hope I can help the next lot through a bit in my own little way.





NO REST FOR THE WICKED

Some of us like to claim we'll 'sleep when we're dead'- But how much is skating by on a few hours' sleep a night or staying awake on a five-day bender really impacting our health? A lot apparently.

Evidence proves lack of sleep can affect us heavily. Studies have proven getting lots of shut eye can help us live a longer, healthier life. Lack of sleep is known to not only affect our mental and physical health, but it also contributes to illnesses and diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer's and obesity.

Sleep is kind of crucial – and realistically, we should be spending up to one third of our lives sleeping. Inadequate sleep leaves immunity depleted, making us more likely to get run down or sick. Missing out on sleep consistently can make you three times more likely to catch a common cold.

Inadequate sleep also affects male sex hormones and virility. As few as four, consecutive bad night's sleep can age a man's virility by as much as ten years (basically reducing sex drive a lot). Sleep also affects our mental health. Issues with sleep, such as lack of it or insomnia can contribute to the onset or worsening of depression, anxiety and even suicidal ideation.

Ever noticed yourself getting cranky or snapping at people more when suffering from lack of sleep? This is because sufficient sleep, especially REM, helps the brain process emotional information and consolidate positive emotional content. Deep sleep is important because it allows our brain to flush out massive amounts of chemicals in the brain and body – essentially refreshing us, not unlike a computer rebooting itself.

Inadequate sleep can also lead to obesity or weight gain. In one of nature's crueler tricks, lack of sleep can lead to an increase in levels of

a hormone that makes you feel hungry...at the same time as suppressing another hormone that makes you feel full. Not only this, the days following inadequate sleep can result in a decrease in our impulse controls- that is, it is a normal and common reaction to reach for fatty or sweet foods when we are tired (increasing our desire for these foods by up to 50%).

There have been many studies proving the link between sleep deprivation and diseases like Alzheimer's. It would no doubt take years and years of harsh sleep deprivation- but it has been proven that the two are connected and that many years of no sleep could increase your chances of getting Alzheimer's.

So, it is worthwhile not only for your mind but also your body to chase some ZZ's and if you can't quite achieve that, try and at least rest your mind and body when possible.

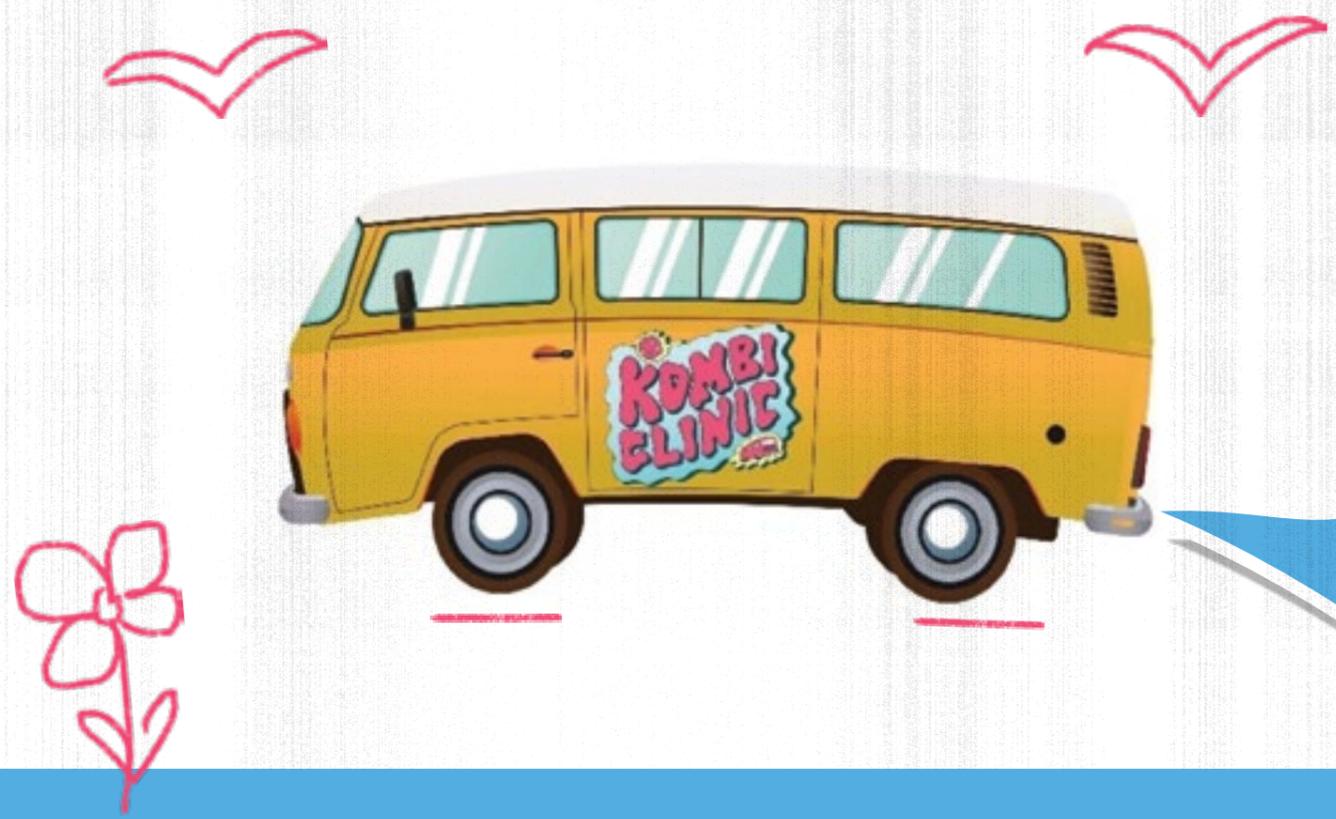
Tips to help you sleep

- Stop eating 3-4 hours before bedtime
- Use blue blockers 2-3 hours before bedtime if you're on the screens
- Go to bed early – get as many uninterrupted hours of sleep as you can
- Use white noise to help ensure deep sleep (like the gentle hum of a fan or a quiet air con)
- Have breaks from using when possible and recharge batteries
- Avoid chocolate and caffeinated food or drinks after 5pm

MERLIN

Black Ocean cold and dark
 I am that hungry shark
 Fast and merciless
 But the only girl
 That could talk to him
 She couldn't swim
 Tell me what's worse than thy
 My only recourse
 Pull her down
 Take her with me
 She drowned
 But I know now
 She'll never die
 She's burning a hole in my mind
 And soon I will be her living memory

By Sarah



INTRODUCING... KOMBI CLINIC

Kombi Clinic is a Queensland-based, mobile outreach medical service focusing on the eradication of Hepatitis C. Operating from a 1975 Volkswagen, the Kombi Clinic links Hepatitis C Care to marginalised and vulnerable people.

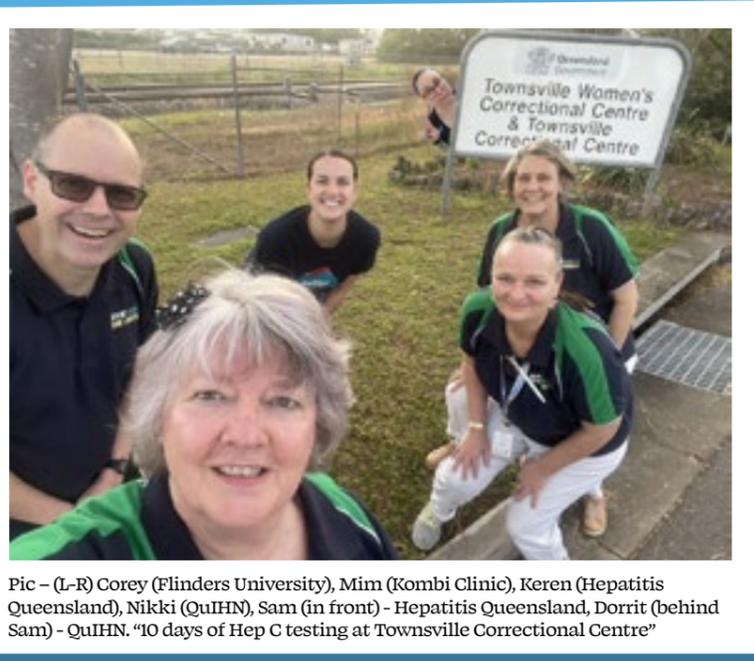
You guessed it . . . that's test, treat and cure Hep C in the back of a Kombi.

We are 4 in total:

- Dr Joss
- Dr Matt
- Nurse Mim
- Michael the Phlebotomist.

Together we have been working for nearly 6 years visiting:

- Drop-In Homeless Shelters
- NSP Venues
- Alcohol and Other Drug Venues
- Probation & Parole Centres
- Nighttime Park Events
- Drug Rehab Services
- Signal Flare BBQs in the Park for Homeless and Needy
- Linking with Beddown



Pic - (L-R) Corey (Flinders University), Mim (Kombi Clinic), Keren (Hepatitis Queensland), Nikki (QuIHN), Sam (in front) - Hepatitis Queensland, Dorrit (behind Sam) - QuIHN. "10 days of Hep C testing at Townsville Correctional Centre"

KOMBI CLINIC – ON THE INSIDE...

With the advent of Cepheid GeneXpert machine and fingerstick Point of Care Testing, we have now tested over 3,500 people in jails around Queensland, in less than 2 years - including Lotus Glen, Townsville, Woodford, Borallon, Gatton and Palen Creek Correctional Centres.

Within Queensland prisons Hepatitis C prevalence has ranged from 2% to 39% across the centres which is why we are advocating for OST (subby, LAI) to be available for ALL who choose to engage in the program.

Plus, if WE are SERIOUS about HCV Elimination . . . We need to conduct a blitz in EVERY Correctional Centre followed up with a PoCT (Point of Care Testing) machine to test in each reception area.

CONTACTING THE KOMBI CLINIC



Our take-home message: We must provide NSP and FINCOL on the inside!

MADAM ALANA

(The names in this true story have been changed to protect the guilty).

Somewhere along the path of my life I made a conscious decision that no man would ever harm me again. So, to this end I went out and bought myself two sawn off double-barrelled shotguns. Both guns were half an inch above the then legal limit.

I actually fell in love with my 'shotties'. They were a Bentleigh pump action (brand new) and an older Brazilian gun with a lovely wooden, carved butt, branded, 'Boito.' Then I purchased a gun rack on which I could display them on my lounge room wall. To me they were things of great beauty and represented the end of male oppression in my life.

A good male friend took me to a dry creek bed in the country to teach me how to shoot them. He warned me they would 'pack a punch' - meaning they would have a significant recoil. This was a huge understatement. The first shot I took aim from my shoulder and the kick from the gun landed me flat on my arse.

The second shot I aimed from my hip and managed to remain standing. Many Saturday arvos and a lot of practice was needed before I felt proficient in the use of my shotties.

During this time, I was a madam and employed a driver, a receptionist and three working girls. The business was twenty-four-seven and I also worked as an escort.

One Friday night I'd sent a girl to see a regular client. This client was an engineer and would see escort ladies in the front office of his engineering workshop. This was a huge building with all manner of engineering machines. The client and his wife lived next door in an unassuming small house. Part of the 'fun' for this man was knowing his wife was just next door, whilst he was having sex with an escort girl. Oh, the naughtiness of it all... (Ho hum).

When the driver and my girl returned to the agency after her two-hour booking, she was crying and very upset. She told me she'd gone to the toilet and

left her handbag in the office with the client. On the way back to the agency she checked her bag, and her money was gone; he'd stolen it from her.

Now, what I did next was NOT about the money. For me, it was about the principle. This man needed to know - you don't mess with me, and you don't upset my girls!

Then I got dressed in black from head to toe and pulled on long, black boots. Then I grabbed one of my shotties and told the driver to take me back to the engineering workshop. When we got there, the office light was still on, which meant the client was still in there. I told the driver to stay in the car and keep the motor running. I grabbed my shottie and quickly walked to the office door, on which I knocked. Then I raised the shottie to my hip level and as he began to open the door, I kicked it open.

I saw the fear in his eyes, and I said, "listen you snivelling excuse for a man, you need to give me back the money you stole from my girl."

Shaking badly, he pulled out his wallet and handed me a wad of cash. I then walked away quickly back to the car and told the driver to take us home.

On arrival back home, I returned the gun to its place on the wall and paid my girl her money. Suddenly, I realised I was euphoric and full of adrenaline. When I gave my girl back her money, she hugged me and said I was her hero.

Although it took a couple of days, I eventually came down of that high, with a thud! O.M.G, what had I done?! The realisation came to me that in my world, if a person owned a gun, they had to be prepared to pull the trigger - and I had to think about, was I prepared to pull that trigger?!

O.M.G again! I was dangerous!

After this incident, my life changed dramatically, it had to. I so, so badly wanted to be someone else. Anyone other than who I had become.

Madam Alana.



LET'S DESTIGMATISE HERPES!

Poor herpes gets a bad rap in the world of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). It's appearance and lack of cure has people filled with dread. Is this fair or have we stigmatised herpes much like drug use has been stigmatised? Let's find out...

What is herpes?

Herpes is a virus and one of the most common infections in humans. There are two different kinds:



Type 1 - is usually found around the lips/nose. You might know it as a cold sore.



Type 2 - is usually found around the genitals or anus.

How many people have it?

More than you would think. It is believed that 1 in 8 Australians have herpes. Around 85% of people have type 1 (cold sores) and 20% have type 2 (genitals). Because the percentage is so high, it's not commonly tested for when you go get a sexual health screen. Testing for herpes causes unnecessary stress in patients as A LOT will return positive.

How do you get it and prevent it?

You can get herpes by direct or indirect contact with someone who has active sores, which can be infectious for 7-12 days.

Direct contact can be skin-to-skin contact, oral sex, penetrative sex, and kissing.

Indirect contact can be sharing water bottles and utensils with someone with active sores, although this is a VERY low risk.

People don't have to have visible sores to be infectious, they can shed the virus in saliva or through sexual body fluids, which can unknowingly lead to herpes. Many people who have type 1 will get it as children from being kissed by adult family members. Whereas people will get type 2 through sexually transmitted fluids via oral sex, vaginal sex, or anal sex.

Unfortunately, it can be hard to prevent oral herpes (cold sores) as most people will have it from their childhood. Not to worry though, you can prevent your kids from getting it by not kissing them on the mouth, nose, or eyes if you know you have it. You should also avoid sharing utensils, drinks, lip balm, razors etc.

Don't let the stigma around herpes stop you from enjoying yourself. There are plenty of ways that you can prevent yourself and your sexual partners from contracting herpes.

You can prevent type 2 (genitals) by using condoms, lube and dental dams. People who have penetrative sex with penis owners are more vulnerable to herpes type 2 due to the likelihood of small tears in the anus or vagina. Using lube (as well as condoms) can prevent these tears...and increase your pleasure.

Always avoid touching any sores and if you touch one, wash your hands to avoid spreading it to other parts of your body or to other people. You can also catch it from unwashed sex toys and mother to baby during vaginal delivery.

What does it look and feel like?

Herpes looks like a small cluster of blisters that can burst and crust over. They can sometimes look red, or you can be swollen around the neck or groin areas. The infected area can also be painful or itchy and people who have it can experience fever. Sometimes going to the bathroom can be painful. Luckily the worst and more painful symptoms are often only part of the first infection and all other outbreaks are more tolerable with just the sores present.

How do I get checked for it?

Herpes is not routinely tested. You need to have symptoms, or your health care provider won't test you. If you do have a sore on your mouth, eye, nose, or genitals you can see your health care provider and they will take a swab. Most health professionals can diagnose herpes by looking at it, but a swab provides a formal diagnosis which you will need to start treatment.

I have herpes, now what?

While there isn't a cure for herpes there are medications to help minimise the pain and spread. Antiviral medication such as famciclovir and valaciclovir are prescription medications that can be taken to quickly resolve an outbreak. You can also take these tablets continuously to prevent shedding that leads to spreading of the virus, as well as any further outbreaks. Despite the common belief that people with herpes are always infectious, many people with herpes may only have one outbreak and then the virus won't show up for months, years and sometimes forever.

Many people don't take the medication and wait it out can have their symptoms go away in 1-2 weeks.

Future outbreaks can be triggered by:

- Minor injuries, surgery, or procedures to the affected area
- Cold and flus, chest infections (low immunity) etc
- **STRESS!** Make sure you're staying on top of your mental health as emotional stress can cause an outbreak.
- Hormones (flaring up before menstruation is common)
- Exposure to the sun

In many cases, no reason for the outbreak is known.

A herpes diagnosis may feel like the end of the world, but it isn't. Being diagnosed can greatly impact people's mental health as they feel "dirty" and like they can't have sex anymore.

YOU CAN HAVE SEX, YOU AREN'T DIRTY, YOU AREN'T ALONE!

Do I need to tell people I have herpes?

You do not have to tell people by law BUT you should. Telling your potential partners allows them to make an informed choice whether to have sex with you or whether they want to use more protection.

If you are taking the antiviral tablets, you are 50% less likely to pass herpes onto someone else. The chance of you passing herpes on can be as low as 1.9%.

Key take-aways:

- Herpes is not a death sentence, and lots of people have herpes whether they know it or not.
- You can spread herpes through your spit, sexual body fluids and contact with sores. This could be kissing your kids/others or having unprotected sex.
- There is no cure, but it can be treated by tablets, creams, and patches.
- You can stop the spread by practicing safe sex (using condoms etc.), getting regular sexual health tests, regular hand washing, not sharing previously mentioned items that come in contact with mouths and genitals when sores are visible.

Resources:

TikTok: @suzbub and @pikeringfitness

LGBTQIA: thedramadownunder.info

Indigenous: youngdeadlyfree.org.au



SEX, DRUGS AND CHINESE MEDICINE

By Raf Nathan

Most people agree we need a healthy and balanced sex life, but in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) 'balanced' means not in excess. We have all heard that you can't have too much sex; wrong. Tapping into your individual quota too much you can weaken the kidney/adrenal complex.

Drugs like speed, meth, E and to an extent weed, seem able to tap into this source of energy. Hence the stories of chem-sex going for hours or even days. The drugs are a partial source of the energy, the other part being the release of your individual quota.

However, if after sex you then find your back and knees are sore, or you get a headache or ringing in the ears- you may have gone too far with tapping into your resources. In TCM these are classic signs of kidney/adrenal weakness. It is believed that excess release of semen and to a lesser extent orgasm in women is a loss of resource.

This kidney weakness flows on to affect the heart and liver and the next level; things happening to you like anger, frustration, insomnia, depression, stress levels through the roof and the dreaded anxiety.

Chinese medicine just like Western medicine has many remedies to support sexual function. Some

'remedies' are quite unusual to our Australian mindset like eating sea-horse, dogs penis or unusual plants. For example, there is a small fungus that forms from a dead caterpillar called Cordyceps originally found only in the remote Himalayan mountains. Harvested wild, this is now worth more than gold due to its legendary anti-aging and sexual support functions.

To restore overall energy, use common sense, something we all don't often do. A three day bender living on drugs and junk food could be amazing but isn't common sense because what goes up must come down. The quickest and simplest way to feel good is by eating hearty food and drinking ample water which will immediately boost your energy. Modern acupuncture and prescribed herbal medicines can also have excellent and quite quick results in improving your energy. Certain formulas tailored to your constitution and acupuncture points can help to restore kidney/adrenal function and reduce some of the side effects of an excess lifestyle.

Raf Nathan is a registered acupuncturist and herbal medicine practitioner working at QuiHN, Brisbane most Mondays.



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THE DIRTY SHOT AND THE BONE EATING BACTERIA

***Matthew has a big scar, with an even bigger story. He says it's the "what not to do" tale that completely changed the way he injects. The battle to get doctors to take his pain seriously, taught him some lessons around stepping up for himself.**

This is Matthew's story.

I've been an opioid user for most of my life. A few years ago, I was regularly injecting a fair bit of heroin and street methadone – my usual MO.

One Sunday morning, I woke up with a sore, stiff neck. I didn't think much of it. I thought it was just from sleeping on it funny.

It slowly got worse over a few days, so I went back to the doctors.

The first doctor literally walked around in circles, repeatedly saying, "I don't know what it is!" He just gave me some strong paracetamol and codeine pills to numb the pain. But that didn't work – the codeine didn't touch the sides because I was already dependent on opioids. I had told him I was dependent – so when he showed no understanding through his choice of prescription, I should have taken that as a big hint that he wasn't a good doctor!

"I was regularly injecting a fair bit of heroin and street methadone – my usual MO."

Then the pain got worse. I had a fulltime job as a gardener and couldn't work. I went back to the same medical centre a week later and saw a different doctor. But he wasn't any more interested than the first one. He just said, "You look stressed, your shoulders are hunched up, take some Valium to relax." and I said, "Sure, whatever you reckon." I mean, we're taught to trust doctors. But the Valium didn't help.



I was upfront with the doctors. I told them I was an opioid injector. What they gave back was a pretty poor effort. They could have done more and taken it more seriously.

It was getting worse, so a couple of days later I went back again. I saw a lady doctor I'd seen once before. I knew she was a bit more switched on. She had a good look at me and we got some x-rays done straight away. She showed me the x-rays and said, "It looks like you've had a big accident, or has something fallen on your neck?"

I told her, "Neither of those things have happened."

She said, "Weird. Go to the hospital ASAP because you've had a significant injury. You need urgent attention."

Being a typical Aussie bloke, I was scared of hospital – I'd never been before. I put off going, but after a few more days of pain, I decided to go in. I remember driving down the road on my way and I was finding it hard to drive because I couldn't twist my head around to check the lanes. Driving over a speed bump felt like my head was going to fall off.

"Go to the hospital ASAP because you've had a significant injury. You need urgent attention."

At the hospital, they took a blood sample and did a CT scan straight away. They said, "You better stay the night."

The next morning, a doctor showed me the scans on his phone. He said "You've got a really nasty thing going on here. According to your blood sample, you have a lot of bacteria that is floating around, and it has landed on your spinal cord. As you can see from these scans, it is eating your backbone vertebrae."

I was gobsmacked. My vertebrae looked like rotten teeth. Like a bone with a big piece eaten out of it. Like a hungry little puppy dog was in there munching away. I had pain shooting up and down my arms and neck.

I told him I was a person who injected drugs and he said, "You probably got this bacteria into you from a dirty shot."

I said, "Yeah, that is probably what happened...What now?"

"We have to give you an operation and rebuild your spine."

They tested a sample of the bacteria and told me it was "Burkholderia capacia complex" which is apparently found in soil and plants.

I'm a gardener, and I used to score after work. I'd shoot up in my hands and my hands would be filthy, because I work with soil!

I also remember that a few weeks before the neck pain started, I had one of the worst dirty hits I'd ever had. I felt so sick, I thought I was going to die. I was spewing and pissing. I guess my hands were dirty when I did that shot. But I had also recently bought and injected a bottle of methadone that the owner had used from – it had her blood in it – and I had a bad feeling about that too.

I think I was still in denial about how bad it was. I was itching to get out of the hospital right up until he said, "You're going in first thing tomorrow morning." Then I realised how serious it was.

After an 8-hour operation, I woke up in a neck brace with a steel cage around my spinal cord and they had fused together several sections of my neck bone (C3 vertebrae down to C7).

It really freaked me out. I had to stay in hospital for a month on heavy duty antibiotics.

Everyone in the hospital treated me well, except for a comment from one of the surgeons. When he found out it was from a dirty shot, he looked at me with disdain and said "What did you use? Toilet water." I thought it was unprofessional, but I just replied with

a plain "No." It was a nasty comment and it really hurt at the time. I felt a lot of shame.

When I woke up after the surgery, a nurse asked me about the experience. I told her what the surgeon had said and that I was feeling really low about it. She said, "He shouldn't have said that. Don't feel ashamed. We're not here to judge you, we're just here to treat you." I was so close to becoming a quadriplegic, but they fixed me pretty good. I still have a lump of steel screwed into my spinal cord, and some massive scars on my front and back. But it was 95% as goof as what it ever was.

"I'm a gardener, and I used to score after work. I'd shoot up in my hands and my hands would be filthy, because I work with soil!"

I now see how important it is to take your health into your own hands and press your doctor for better answers. If you think they're being shit, or they are disrespecting you, get a second (or third) opinion. Don't let them push you around because you are a drug user. Give them all the information they need to fix you up without shame. It's our health and we deserve the best care there is.

I used to be really afraid of hospitals. I saw them as places of pain and sickness. I have a different view of hospitals now. I see them as places of care. It has given me more compassion for nurses and doctors, to see the stuff they deal with daily.

For anyone who is scared of going to hospital, please don't be, just go for it. Going

to hospital is better than the alternative, (like a wheelchair for the rest of my life).

The whole experience made me want to try harder to be healthy and to find other ways to enjoy life. It made me a lot more careful with how I use. I have changed the way I mix up and inject. Before this experience, I was never the cleanest user in town. Because we do it every day, we forget injecting can be risky business. I was well and truly due for a review of the way I did things.

Nowadays, before I use, I always wash my hands really well, as well as any other injecting site, with soap and water then with antiseptic hand sanitiser or swabs. I've learnt that the way to clean an injection site with swabs is to just wipe once with the swab in one direction – not to keep rubbing it about because that just pushes the germs around.

I haven't shared a fit for a long time – not since living through hep C and thankfully getting treated with the incredible new treatments around now. But I did reuse my own fits, partly to save money and partly from laziness. Now I use sterile injecting equipment every time.

Another thing is that I'm very careful who I buy my drugs from, so I'm not buying cut or contaminated gear and I use filters every time, even for ice.

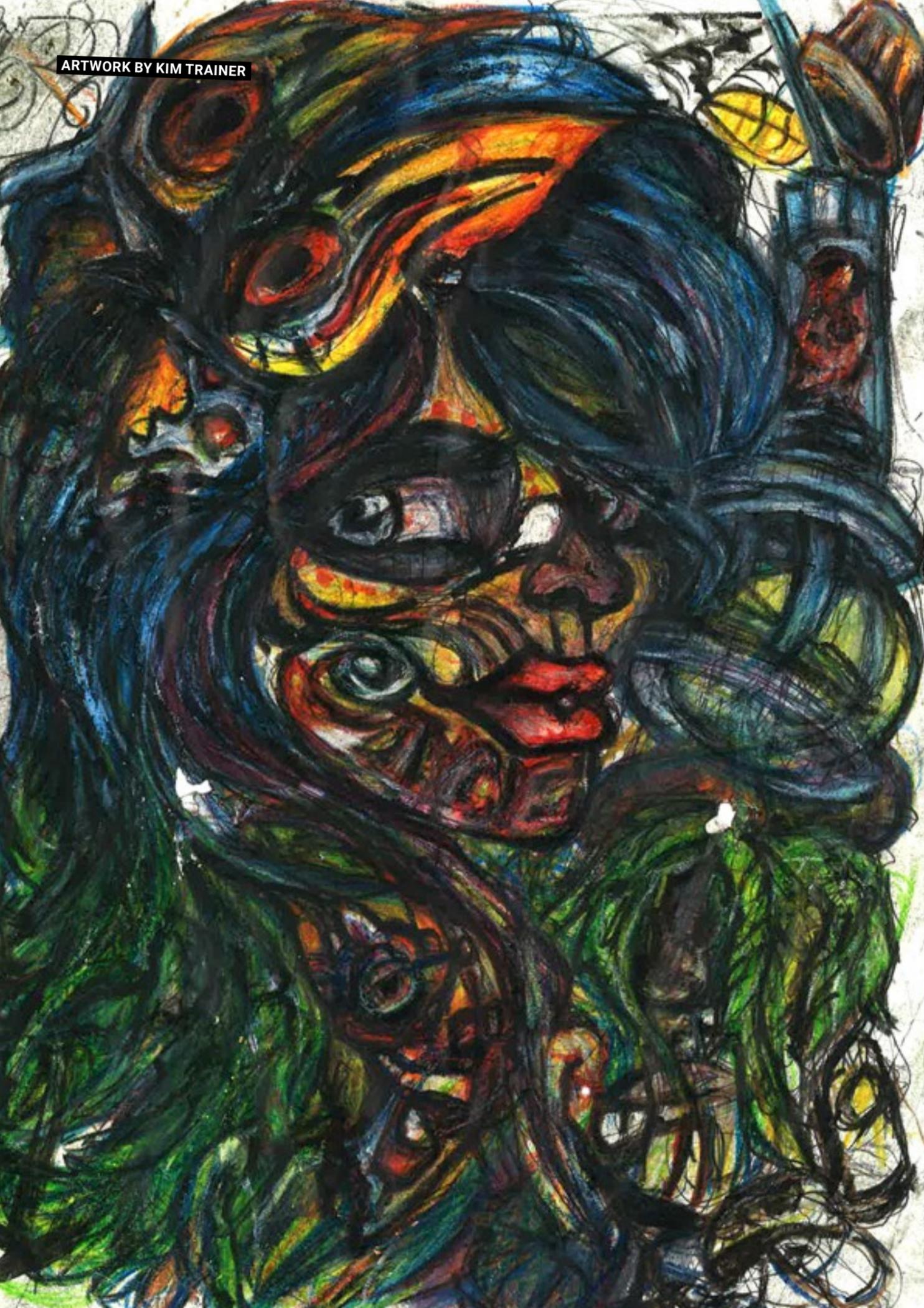
All this stuff doesn't take much thought or time, and it's worth paying attention to the details for my health. After my near-miss experience, as well as getting older, I no longer believe I am 10 foot tall and bulletproof.

An extra couple of minutes us nothing when it means your life.

*(*Matthew's name has been changed to protect his identity)*

*Kind thanks to *Matthew for his incredible story and a huge shout-out to NUAA/User's News for giving us permission to reprint this article.*

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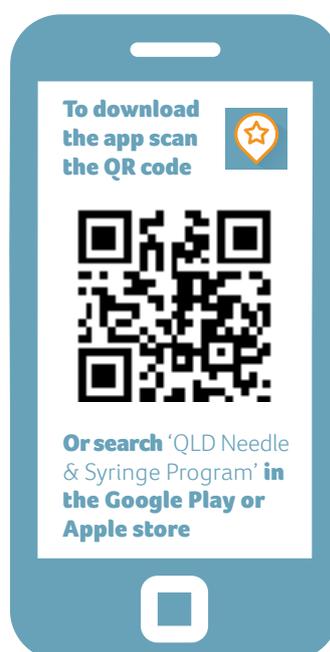
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