

Financial impact on Sling the Mesh members

Speech for APPG on First Do No Harm 26/01/22

When people suffer from extreme pain and are ignored, or have to fight for help, waiting unacceptably long times for treatment, the mental health impact is severe. When you add in how life-changing complications impact your ability to work, and the knock-on financial impact, it becomes the final devastating blow to life as you once knew it.

I hope this talk gives an insight into the financial devastation we see on the support group of more than 9,300 members and the desperate need for financial redress for these women and their families.

Our latest Sling The Mesh Survey shows that:

Forced to give up work	1 in 3	36.7%
Forced to accept reduced hours	1 in 5	18.8%

Furthermore:

Need a stick to walk	1 in 4	26.8%
Need a wheelchair	1 in 14	6.7%
Lost home	1 in 33	2.95%
Lost primary relationship = extra financial pressure	1 in 6	17%
Considered taking own life	1 in 4	26%

The emotional impact is appalling. The monetary knock-on effect adds insult to injury. Taking our survey were people with a huge range of careers including childminders, nurses, special needs learning assistants, web developers, hairdressers, teachers, software developers, accountants, local government department managers, police, care home staff and company directors. Employed and self-employed.

On a personal level I spent half my week working as a journalist, the other half running a children's and wedding photography business, which I had to close within weeks of mesh surgery.

Every career you can imagine at every level. Impacted.

For many women having to give up work before retirement age is affecting women's pensions, their National Insurance contributions and eating away at life savings.

People are having to re-mortgage to survive, some are moving back in with families as they can no longer afford to live in their homes.

These were bright and vibrant women with careers, happy marriages, holidays, hobbies.

Now, they have costs they could never have planned for.

We are talking about long term care, mobility scooters, wheelchairs, converting homes to become disability friendly, getting rid of manual cars and replacing with automatic as the pelvic pain means they struggle to change gears.

Downsizing to bungalows as they can no longer manage stairs, having disability hand rails and stair lifts installed, converting garages to wetrooms for a downstairs bathrooms, paying for cleaners, home help, gardening.

All things women could never have imagined needing when going for what we were assured was a simple, low risk, surgery.

Costs include hefty private mesh removal bills for those who just cannot wait on the ever growing NHS lists, travel to hospital and doctor appointments across the UK. Some women are having to travel hundreds of mile round trips for each appointment. Some flying in from Northern Ireland as there is no care for them in their country. And we are seeing on the group that these appointments are often cancelled last minute, after women have already travelled and arrived at their hotel the night before.

The costs of trying anything to ease pain. Prescription costs, pain relief medication, physiotherapy, myofacial release therapy, Tens Machines, special cushions to sit on in the day, expensive support mattresses and pillows to offer some relief at night. Stoma products, incontinence pads, analgesic gels. And so it goes on.

There are loss of earnings for those who are self-employed or for partners who are self-employed and need to take time off work to drive to hospital appointments. It is hard to put a cost on the overwhelming loss. Suffice to say once a person is mesh injured, even after a removal, life, is never the same again. Every mesh injured person has to accept a new normal. It has a financial impact for every single one of us.

To conclude, I asked Sling The Mesh members what they wanted me to put in this speech. There were more than 100 replies. I shall end with six women's stories:

- 1. Had to go part time as a hairdresser, am finding it hard to stand for long periods. I had to buy automatic car. Can't sit for long periods, going to have to move to a small house /flat or live with relatives. Can't cope with this house and garden anymore.*
- 2. I lost my 14 year job in the NHS because of mesh. One essay away from my degree so lost that too. My money goes on pads, comfy furniture, lost money*

through husband having to take me to numerous appointments, leaving work with no pay, aids for the home, new adapted bathroom, the cost of medications, the added cost of utilities heating and having to wash more due to accidents, I have a motability car, but it costs a lot of my benefits.

- 3. I was a nurse, lost job on ill health, unable to do my role...age just 36. No pay out or pension.*
- 4. Lost my dream job. Had to move to a disabled friendly property and buy automatic car. All spare money goes on pads. Having to fundraise for removal costs and appointments.*
- 5. Forced to take early retirement, 10 years before pension retirement age and 17 years before state pension age. Loss of more than 50% of pension value. Unable to get enhancement due to retirement on ill health grounds as am told 'nothing wrong' with me.*
- 6. Mentally and physically I am broken. Can't work and am having to get a Psychiatric Assistance Dog for emotional support. I am training it to intervene when I self-harm. <https://pads.foundation/>*

Many of these women cannot cope with the stress of taking out legal action against their surgeon. Many cases are dropped when an "expert witness" claims their pain is nothing to do with mesh. For others they fall out of UK legal timeframes to make a claim in the first place. And when amounts are offered, they are often woefully low.

These women have been harmed through no fault of their own.

These women urgently need and deserve financial redress.