

On to a positive finish

Rianne about her studies 'Midwifery' at Thomas More

Rianne (22) from Poppel is studying Midwifery at Thomas More University of Applied Sciences and was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia two years ago. SIHO talked with her about her challenging path.

The harsh reality

After frequently having bruises and nosebleeds which were difficult to clot, Rianne was suddenly diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia. 'We arrived at the emergency room and I said to my mom: "It's more serious than you think". Less than 20 minutes later we were told it was leukemia. After further examinations at the Antwerp University Hospital (UZA), I also turned out to have the Philadelphia chromosome. This makes me more likely to relapse and makes my disease more difficult to overcome.'

The support of Thomas More

Rianne was in the second year of the Midwifery programme

when she received her diagnosis. At first, she was mainly concerned about her studies. 'Later on, there were also thoughts like "what if I don't survive this?". Right before my diagnosis I followed the course "Pathology". I knew what to expect and what could go wrong. That didn't really play in my advantage at that time.'

"My lecturers have always supported me.

Rianne is still very grateful towards Thomas More University of Applied Sciences for the support and flexibility. 'I had been out for almost a year. Even then I could always count on the support of my lecturers. I had to postpone my exams, but I was allowed to indicate when I was ready again. My lecturers also came at my home to let me take my exams. Furthermore, I got more time to finish them. I was also able

to spread my internship, which made it feasible for me. My lecturers have always showed me their concerns and commitment, which results in a close bond.'

A very positive attitude

Rianne always tries to communicate very openly about her illness and treatment, both to her lecturers and classmates, as well as at her internship. Even if it wasn't that easy at first. 'Everyone already had so much grief, so I didn't want to bother them with my grief as well. Luckily, I could always talk about this with the nurses and my university. I learned to be more open.'

Rianne attaches great importance to describing the reality as well as possible. She has a very positive attitude herself. 'I was admitted to the hospital and my nurse said: "Rianne if you step in positively, you will probably step out

positively too." I have always remembered that and I have always remained positive, despite the times when I sometimes thought that things were not going to work out.'

"The finish, that I am going to reach, must be positive. Not only for myself, but for the others as well.

'After receiving my diagnosis, I immediately said I wanted to fight for it. Now I would like to do something with my experience, I want to make something positive out of it. I think the finish that I will reach must be positive. Not just for myself, but for the others as well.'

Initiatives

Besides her studies, Rianne is certainly not idle. Rianne testifies about her path because she really wants to point out the importance of good nursing in similar situations to nursing students. Rianne is also writing a book, in which she openly shares her feelings and thoughts about her journey. 'For me, the post-diagnosis period was one of the toughest. You suddenly go from care provider to patient. With my book I want to show that it is okay to feel bad and be

angry. I hope to bring people in similar situations some recognition.'

"You suddenly go from care provider to patient.

Rianne is also working on other projects such as speaking in a webinar about fertility. Together with "Kom op tegen Kanker" and the UZA, she is developing a new policy regarding guidance during treatments.

Organizations against Cancer

Rianne attaches great importance to meeting peers, because they really know what it is like to experience it. In the hospital and during the holiday week of "Kom op tegen kanker" in Ostend, Rianne made many friends and also. Last year they set up a team for Rianne during the Relay For Life" of "Foundation against Cancer". 'The purpose of that "Relay For Life" is to fill up 24 hours with runners or walkers.



My lecturers also joined the "Relay For Life" and it is amazing to see that they also support me outside of school.'

Uncertainty

Rianne indicates that it is always anxious to wait and see. 'With every bruise, you hope it won't be anything bad. You have really lost confidence in your own body. And that is now slowly starting to rebuild.'

Rianne notices now that she can also be more empathetic as a care provider, since she is a patient herself. She knows how important good caretaking is and it is largely because of this that she already came this far. As a result, she would also like to follow a Ba-na-ba in Nursing via a shortened programme. In addition, she would also like to have something on hand if it would become too physically demanding. Rianne still regularly returns to her department to see her nursing team again. 'The reasons I'm going back are primarily to see them again, but also because they enjoy meeting someone who is doing well. This gives them a positive boost to see that they helped realize that. Often, they only see patients back when they are doing badly again.'

“Sometimes you now
longer have time to doubt.”



Rianne also indicates that she has become much more mature and that she enjoys the little things much more. ‘I was in the hospital for seven weeks and I loved being back outside to feel the wind or the sun. In the past I have always been a huge doubter compared to now. You know how quickly it can be over. Sometimes you no longer have time to doubt. Now I want to grasp all the opportunities that are offered to me so that I can mean something to others.’

Keep communicating

For someone who’s in the same situation, Rianne especially encourages open communication. ‘Just try to show what you feel. It’s okay to have bad days. Communicate openly that you are still afraid of checkups. I also worry about that for weeks in advance. But know that it is okay to be scared.’