Hi! My name is Julia Baxendine-Jones. I qualified in medicine in 1994, completed my house officer year, went straight into training in cellular pathology and now I’m an associate specialist in Cytology. My career in medicine has been shaped by something people can’t see & most of my family, friends & colleagues never suspected: mental illness, in particular OCD.

I have had OCD since I was a child but was so ashamed that I hid it from everyone. I also had an eating disorder in my late teens & vehemently denied any suggestion that I had a problem. In 2017 I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

Left untreated for 35 years the OCD unsurprisingly got worse, consumed more and more of my life and became so severe that I reached a crisis point at home and at work. At work I thought I was the only one struggling and just did whatever I needed to do to get through my day. I had already resigned from my job twice and then returned, but the OCD was still there and as it worsened I felt hopelessly backed into a corner. I nearly left medicine for good  - no one would have needed to know why , but the OCD of course would have just moved with me with thoughts intruding my mind seemingly targeting everything I cared about.  But in 2014, instead of leaving, I took the first step towards getting treatment and how my life has changed since that day!  I now enjoy my work and home life again in a way I never thought possible.

I have no qualifications in art - not even an O’level/GCSE - I haven’t been on any courses - none at all. I mention this so that as you read these words you start to entertain the idea that no matter how little experience or perceived creative ability you have you realise that you too can create art. I didn’t consciously start painting for my mental health - I saw art, appreciated it and wondered whether I could create my version of it. I bought  the raw materials and gave it a go. The process was exciting and soothing and the tangible end product was extraordinarily rewarding.
I remember, it didn’t feel like art - it felt quite scientific - getting things in proportion, reflecting what I could see by using paint on canvas with the tiniest change in shade or light transforming what is perceived and if the desired effect is not achieved - just making the adjustments required.

I love the process of creating art - it turns out it is my own way of practising mindfulness and how wonderful it is to make something that people can look at and enjoy especially when I recreate my version of their beloved pet with a 3D twist - coloured fabric for a tail or beard, rock salt for winter snow!

How strange life can be. I spent most of my life hiding my mental illnesses and yet now my life is unfolding in a new direction with my passion in art providing a means of contributing to helping other doctors through collaboration with Dr Caroline Walker, the Joyful Doctor. Here I am, not only as Head of Joyful Doctor Art, being part of Team Joy striving to raise awareness, reduce stigma and subsidise confidential support for doctors who are struggling but I’m also honoured to be a cRxeate Fellow - open to questions, keen to inspire and willing to help you take that step into the world of stirring emotions through art.

Dr Julia Baxendine-Jones
Head of Joyful Doctor Art
The Joyful Doctor
Helping you do your best work without the sacrifice.

NB to see more of Julia’s work which includes animal paintings using acrylics and also a ‘miniature railway men’ body of work see the art galleries at the website. [www.joyfuldoctor.com](http://www.joyfuldoctor.com)