Four paintings charting one patient’s experience of long-term chronic illness have been on display in the Trinity Centre for Health Science at St James’s Hospital since September 2018.

Entitled Portrait of a Patient, the exhibition features four patient portraits by artist Sinead that charts Sinead’s own personal experience with a long-term chronic illness, ulcerative colitis.

The exhibition aims to use art and, in particular, the lived experience of the patient, to assist the education of health care professionals. The exhibition is in the Trinity Centre for Health Sciences close to the medical library and hopes to provoke students into thinking about how illness affects the patient over and above the physical manifestations. The project has been supported by Trinity College Dublin’s Provost Fund for Visual and Performing Arts.

Artist Sinead Lawless added: “Portrait of a Patient is my on-going project. It permeates through everything else that I do. For most of my life I have found myself held ransom to illness and disorder in one form or another. It is not something we choose but can get in the way of our career, our goals and our relationships. It makes us vulnerable and dependent, makes us question who we are, and our role in society.”

“In an information-ready, self-help society, the guilt of being ill belongs to the patient. Taking responsibility for yourself is the modern day mantra. Although there is merit in this, it can also lead to a lack of empathy. Some illnesses can’t be ‘fixed’. Being a long-term patient has taken its toll on my self-esteem. At the beginning, I used to think I needed to wait until I felt better before I could continue with my life. Now I realise that illness is something that I need to adapt to and factor in. We can’t spend our whole lives waiting. Illness and disorders are forever present and they affect us all in different ways.”

This is a temporary exhibit runs until Summer 2019.