

31 July 2020

Dear Member

The uncertainty continues with Government rules and advice changing as circumstances alter. I had hoped that by now I could have offered positive assurance in relation to the feasibility of branch meetings starting soon. However, this is not possible yet and I will be sending to branches shortly, a risk assessment process which will need to be followed before branch meetings can re-start in communal settings.

As regards those meetings that normally take place in hospital premises, it seems unlikely to me that Trusts would allow people into their premises this year.

I hope I am proven wrong!

However, I do know that some branches are making plans for meetings to be held in the Autumn and also that some branches have held committee meetings in the open air with social distancing and other branches have reinstated their walks and rambles, which is all very encouraging.

In my last letter I referred to the 72nd anniversary of the NHS and I am delighted that two of our members Barbara Baker and Monica Peters met on zoom with the Prime Minister, who was enthralled by their stories. A very shortened version of the interview appeared on Twitter. The interview itself lasted about 40 minutes a fuller version of the story will appear in September's Fellowship newsletter. My thanks to Barbara and Monica, who did the Fellowship proud.

What else do you think we should have done to help celebrate the 72nd anniversary? Let me know and we will take these into account in our planning for next year's event. Incidentally, if you were born on 5 July in any year, or were born in 1948 can you please let central office know so perhaps we can do something special for you next year.

I am encouraged that my last letter led to even more members giving central office permission to use their email address and we are currently in discussion how we can introduce bulk email circulation and perhaps we may have achieved this by my next letter. I am also astonished by the numbers of people participating in the Mirthy talks and the one on 30 June attracted over 540 participants. These will continue and the next two are on 11 August "A Tibetan journey" and 25 August "The Life and Times of Edith Cavell". The good news is that Mirthy have agreed to continue the fortnightly talks after lockdown until at least the turn of the year.

Over 50 of you expressed your concern that the BBC will start charging over 75's for TV licences from 1 August. Whilst the Fellowship in support of its members is opposed to this action, I cannot endorse the Silver Voices campaign of "Gumming up the works" with "the aim to make the cost of enforcing and collecting the fee so great that the BBC will have to go the Government and get them to reinstate the free licence".

Some of our members have joined Silver Voices and they may be prepared to participate in such action.

If you are over 75, you will receive a letter from TV Licensing after 1 August. The fee can be paid in a lump sum or in instalments and paid by card, on line, over the phone, direct debit, cheque, postal order or by taking a debit card or cash to any paypoint. TV Licensing will start sending out the 4.5 million "payment invitation" letters in batches from the beginning of August.

I am aware that there has already been a number of scams attempted. Age UK has promised to let us have a copy of the official letter to be sent out by TV Licensing and as soon as we have this, we will place it Facebook, on the website and send a copy to all branches.

A number of branches have now started to use Zoom, Newham and Suffolk West spring to mind and I continue to encourage branches to make use of this platform to keep in touch with members.

As always, please don't hesitate to contact me if there is anything you want to discuss I am always amenable to innovative ideas and I look forward to seeing members in person again, but still not sure when.

Finally, some of you may have caught the BBC4 repeat programme shown on 7 July entitled "Black Nurses - the women who saved the NHS". It was superb, emotive, full of reminiscences and had a clear representation of the culture and environment operating in the 50's and 60's. Two of our members (at least) appeared in the programme. Lynette Richard-Lorde - first black Nursing Officer and Carmen Brooks-Johnson - a midwife. These are both members from St George's, Merton and Wandsworth branch. Their stories will appear in the September newsletter and some details have already been posted on our Facebook page.

With kind regards.
Yours sincerely



John Rostill OBE
Chief Executive