

Chief Executive's letter

December 2023

mike.seaton@nhsrf.org.uk



Introduction

This bulletin is slightly different as I'm going to concentrate on giving feedback and updates from our conference. It is important I do this to help all members who weren't able to join us to understand where things are at and how we can all work together to ensure a positive future for the Fellowship. It was my first conference and the highlight for me was undoubtedly getting to know some of our members – I hope that is something that will continue into 2024.

The event started on the Friday night with a welcome dinner with a very special guest, the King's representative the Lord Lieutenant for Lincolnshire Mr Toby Dennis who expressed warm greetings and reiterated his support and encouragement for the NHS and the Fellowship.

Speakers and presentations

Our conference started with a superb presentation from Samantha Allen, chief executive of the Integrated Care Board for the North East and North Cumbria. She explained what an ICB is and how it works (which I think everyone in the room appreciated) and also gave a fascinating rundown of the history of the NHS as part of our final celebrations for the 75th anniversary.

We then heard from our former trustee Suzy Brain England who is also chair of Keep Britain Tidy about how we should "love where we live." As part of the discussion, we are looking to work in partnership with Keep Britain Tidy to run spring litter pick ups amongst branches and I should have more details on this in the next edition.

We then had Professor Stephanie Snow from Manchester University talking about her new book *Our Stories: 75 Years of the NHS from the People Who Built It, Lived It and Love It* which captures the stories of the NHS as told by the people – including some of our members – who have worked in it. The book is a fascinating read and I wholeheartedly recommend it.

We also enjoyed video presentations from Amanda Pritchard (Chief Executive of NHS England), Jason Leitch (Clinical Director for the Scottish Government) and Antony Tiernan, who led the communications and engagement strategy for NHS England for the 75th birthday celebrations.

Perhaps one of the most powerful presentations was in the afternoon session and focused on the work of the charity Mercy Ships which fits out hospital ships and performs surgery in some of the most deprived countries in the world – all run by volunteers. I think everyone in the room was deeply moved and affected – and I'd urge you to visit their website to find out more. The

conference decided that instead of our usual gala dinner collection for our own Benevolent Fund, we would donate the money raised to Mercy Ships. I'm pleased to say that the £1,002 raised on the night was then matched by a Government scheme so a donation of £2,004 was sent to Mercy Ships. You can find out more about their work at www.mercyships.org.uk

Annual General Meeting

Our Annual General Meeting was the formal business of the day and started with an overview of the year from myself and George Kempton. Our vice president Vic Griffiths spoke passionately about his concerns for the future of the Fellowship and George confirmed that his comments, which were echoed in the room, were heard and noted. Our honorary treasurer Gareth Oakland gave an assessment of the financial situation the Fellowship is currently facing and answered some questions relating to this.

The minutes and papers (including the reports from George, Gareth and I) of the AGM are available in the resources and information section of the members area of the website.

Question and answer session

Thank you to those members who submitted questions in advance of the meeting. It was intended that they would provide a starting point for a discussion and that they would be added to by questions received at the conference and from the floor in the session.

We were completely overwhelmed to receive more than 25 questions from the conference on the day and the conference decided that it would not do those questions justice to try and answer them quickly or incompletely. Therefore, it was announced to conference that all the questions would be answered separately and fed back to members. I am pleased to attach this document to my bulletin and I apologise that it is a large document, however we made a promise at conference to answer your questions as fully as possible. Lorraine Taylor, chair of the Members Council, has also been involved in the production of this document and my thanks go to her for that support.

Some discussion did take place regarding the questions that were submitted in advance but myself and George are very aware of the feedback received about this particular session. I can only apologise that it didn't quite go the way we had anticipated and that we will learn from that for next year. I do very much hope that the Q&As document will provide answers to the questions that you have and am very happy to receive further feedback and additional queries. Our head of comms Lucia Hiden is co-ordinating this particular piece of work and you can email her at comms@nhsrf.org.uk

Benefits and exhibition stands

We were delighted to welcome a number of our current benefits partners to our event and talk with you about the ways in which your membership can help you to access the goods, services and discounts they offer. They have told us how much they enjoyed speaking with you and are already planning to join us next year.

As I said in my presentation, attracting new benefits is one of our top priorities and there's a lot of work going on behind the scenes with a number of new benefits in the pipeline. I am pleased to announce that we launched two new benefits just this last week – Mekong River Cruises offering a 10% discount off a lovely looking journey down the Mekong River and Motofinity which provides discounts of up to 32% off the costs of a new car with a range of different finance options available.

I will announce details of further benefits as soon as we can and I'll repeat what I said that we really want to work in partnership with you so please let me know which new benefits you would be interested in us sourcing for you. My email address is at the top of the bulletin. I'm also hoping to provide an overview of our benefits and our approach to managing benefits in the New Year.

New strategy for the future direction of the Fellowship

In my presentation, I shared an overview of the five-year strategy document that the Trustees have agreed will underpin the work they, the Members Council and the staff team will look to implement alongside myself. A copy of the strategic map is available on the website now <https://nhsrf.org.uk/members-area/resources-information/> and the full document will be available on request from Central Office from the end of January.

New regional representatives and member trustees

Myself and George both made a plea for any member interested in having more of influence in how the Fellowship moves forward and working with the teams behind the scenes to consider becoming either a trustee or a regional representative on the Members Council. I'd strongly urge any member to consider taking up these roles – we currently have eight vacancies on the Members Council and three vacancies for member trustees. These roles are vital in ensuring the voice of the membership is heard and engagement with members is something I'm really keen to develop further.

If you are interested in taking on one of these roles, please get in touch with Central Office.

Branch handbook feedback

Conference also heard that a revised version of the branch handbook is available on the members section of the website here <https://nhsrf.org.uk/members-area/resources-information/> and is open for comments. I'd encourage you to have your say and ask you to submit your thoughts to Chris Kitchin and Lorraine Taylor by January 15 to organiser@talktalk.net and lorrainetaylor321@btinternet.com

Thank you

Finally I just want to give a personal thank you to the staff who were involved in the conference planning, delivery and over the weekend. Sherry, Debbie, Lucia and Angela all worked incredibly hard and I know many of you enjoyed talking (and dancing!) with them. I am very grateful for their effort and support.

I would also like to express a final note of thanks to Geoff and Oli from Isle of Wight Tours for their excellent organisation and hosting of the conference and I look forward to working with them again next year.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

I ended my presentation wishing all delegates a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and I'd like to extend that here to all members. As I said at the conference, it has been a difficult first year for me with a number of major decisions needing to be made. I very much hope we can take the energy and enthusiasm that was abundantly clear at the conference and turn that into a positive year for the Fellowship.

Obituaries

Sadly I do need to inform all members of the deaths of two long-standing stalwarts of the organisation.

Mary Twiney was 98 and one of the earliest, if not founding members of the Royal Berkshire branch, and she sadly died in September. She was the branch chair for many years but by 2020 she was completely blind but still found sessions interesting and appreciated the social elements more than ever. Other members would bring her to meetings and take her home whilst she would regale them with stories. She was made an honorary member in 2020 but needed to move into a nursing home four months ago nearer her daughter. The branch said: "She is sadly missed as she endeared herself to all members."

Anne Bailey was also an honorary member of the Harrogate branch in recognition of her many years as branch secretary and various other roles. She died in November having only resigned her position less than two years ago. Her branch described her as: "a really kind and caring person."

My condolences go to their families and friends within the branches.

Central Office contact details: telephone 01305 361 317, email sherry.smith2@nhs.net or Debbie.arnold4@nhs.net