

Chairman's Annual Report 2007

Membership has remained more or less steady, consisting of 19 charities and 16 individual members, covering some 21 neurological conditions. Our executive has been 10 strong. I am pleased to report that we have had another busy year with progress in many areas, although we have also been faced with a number of problems and there remains much to do. With the decentralisation of the NHS, budgetary problems and the merger of health authorities, there has been much uncertainty and staff change. However, things are now beginning to bed down and the new arrangements beginning to take effect. For instance, Berkshire West PCT has recently published its draft Commissioning Strategy of how it will buy in healthcare services for the next 3 years.

During the year we have been concerned that there has been little progress with the implementation of the National Service Framework (NSF) for Long-term Neurological Conditions. We have also seen the closure of the rehabilitation unit at Henley Hospital, with a loss some beds but there has been a transfer of 5 neuro-rehabilitation beds to West Berks Community Hospital. Local plans for meeting the requirements of the NSF by establishing a Community Neuro-Rehabilitation Team in West Berkshire should emerge and we have tried to play a full part in the process. Sadly, PCT reorganisation has impeded the progress. The committee and other WBNA members have tried to represent patient views in this initiative and also by taking part in many other advisory bodies and by attending patient panels, hospital board meetings and PCT meetings. We continue to maintain a dialogue with our professional colleagues.

I am delighted to report the very positive evaluation of the role of Specialist Neurology Nurse for Rare and Complex Conditions. This 2-year post was pump-primed with funds raised by WBNA and its partners. The impact study carried out by Reading University concluded that the Specialist Nurse has had a very positive impact on the lives of patients and carers in Berkshire West. WBNA would like to thank all those who have supported the Specialist Nurse Project. We are indebted to Carol Allen who bravely took on the untested role and demonstrated just what can be achieved with hard work, dedication and professional insight. We are grateful to Professor Christine Collin who provided clinical leadership and to the Reading and West Berkshire Branch of the Motor Neurone Disease Association, The Berkshire Branch of the British Polio Fellowship and the Reading Branch of the Huntington's Disease Society and all those who provided funds. We are delighted that Berkshire West PCT has provided interim funding for the post, recognizing its value both to patients and NHS. We look forward to working with the PCT to ensure that the post becomes permanent.

In April WBNA hosted its third conference '*Challenges Facing Neuro-Rehab*' in collaboration with Professor Christine Collin and Penny Lilley. The theme was neurological journeys of patients with: spinal injury, head injury, motor neurone disease and stroke. Again we attracted some first rate speakers. As well as key figures describing the latest scientific and technical developments, patients and therapists provided valuable expert witness on their neurological journeys. The conference ended with a debate on the subject 'Assisted Suicide'. The conference attracted over 140 delegates and was accredited by the Royal College of Physicians. We are most grateful for all the hard work by the organisers.

We were delighted when WBNA was awarded £10,000 from the European Social Fund to investigate the demand for hydrotherapy, and the feasibility of building and running a hydrotherapy pool in the Newbury/Thatcham area. Profundus Consulting Ltd carried out the work and identified a wide range of people who can benefit from access to hydrotherapy facilities. The report pointed out the need for a good central location for the pool since many potential users find travelling difficult. Based on comparisons with other such pools, it emphasised the importance of good design to make the pool useful to as wide range of users as is possible. A partnership has been formed to take the project through to the next stages of development such as finding a suitable site and raising funds for the project. The hydrotherapy pools

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project received a further boost recently when John Holt, was awarded 'The Best Volunteer within a Social Enterprise', by Social Enterprise Berkshire.

Discussions with other interested parties have been taking place on the possibility of providing suitable exercise and gym facilities for those with physical disabilities. Such facilities could complement a warm water hydrotherapy pool provided a robust business plan can be developed.

We were disappointed to learn that Active Therapies Partnership, a fully-incorporated sub-committee of WBNA, had failed to obtain funding from the Lotteries Board for the '*Activities for the Brain*' project. *Singing for the Brain* sessions, organised by the Alzheimer's Society, have been successful for over two years, providing social, physical and mental stimulation for people with dementia and their carers. We will be looking for other sources of funding enable this programme to be extended to include walking and yoga, as well as make it available to those with other neurological conditions.

The Department of Health recently announced it is devolving responsibility for developing the NSF for Long-term Neurological Conditions to SHAs and PCTs. This means it is essential that patients with long-term conditions have a voice in planning and commissioning improved neurological services. With this in mind WBNA has helped establish a South Central Neurological Alliances Partnership to provide advice to commissioners in the South Central Neuroscience Network. To expand this partnership WBNA has helped support the inaugural meeting of the Hampshire Neurological Alliance and this year received a small award from FORZA to help establish a Neurological Alliance in the East of Berkshire.

Members of WBNA have worked during the year to represent all people affected by a neurological condition in Berkshire West. We have also engaged with those representing patients in other regions and played a part at a national level with one of our committee serving as a Trustee of the Neurological Alliance. We continue to value our relationship with professionals and are pleased that they continue to consult with us on a regular basis. Finally, it remains to thank our President and Patrons for their support and our committee members for all their hard work. We are also grateful for administrative assistance from Community Action West Berkshire during the year.

David Roberts
Chairman
3rd September 2007