

Chairman's Annual Report for 2012

This is the thirteenth AGM of West Berkshire Neurological Alliance and I report on a year of mixed fortunes. The Coalition's policies to reduce the budget deficit are now biting hard and deep. West Berkshire Council has inflicted swingeing cuts to its care and support services, which inevitably will have a severe impact on those living with a neurological condition. The NHS is suffering from severe budget constraints and undergoing major restructuring, as directed by the Coalition Government's Health and Social Bill. The demise of the struggling PCT is no small loss but we wait to see what will replace it. Newbury and District Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) will take over full responsibility for commissioning local health services in April 2013; however, the proposed governance and organisational structures for Federation of Berkshire West CCGs look to be as Byzantine as those of the outgoing health authorities. Some good news is that the NHS has announced that a Strategic Clinical Network is to be established for neurology, dementia and mental health. This is most welcome, as the Stroke and Cancer Networks have brought great improvements in transforming and raising standards of services for patients elsewhere. There is certainly much to do in the field of neurology, for according to a recent Neurological Alliance report, poor care means that too many of the eight million patients with a neurological condition are admitted to hospital as emergencies, experience delays in diagnosis and receive too little information about what is wrong with them. With half a million people a year being diagnosed each year, the number of patients with a neurological condition is set to skyrocket in the next decade so the NHS needs to focus on what matters most and make sure that those with neurological conditions receive integrated care and the support at the right time and in the right place. We remain astonished that local commissioners have not acted on any of our money-saving ideas. Instead, the PCT has set out to produce a comprehensive needs assessment for neurology, a task it is unlikely to complete before it is wound up, being already more than 18 months behind the initial target it set itself.

Membership in 2012 consists of 27 charities and 17 individual members, covering some 28 neurological conditions. Our executive is currently 10 strong and has had a busy year. We have funded all our activities and our reserves are strong in terms of our forward plans. We were delighted when South Central Health Authority awarded us a grant of £10k for a project to appoint a GP with Special Interest in the Management of Pain. We are working with Drs Deepak Ravindran and Faraz Jeddi of the Royal Berkshire Hospital take the project forward and help improve local pain services. Since our last AGM we have co-hosted a Focus Group on 'Minimum Standards for Community Neuro-Rehab Teams'. We also hosted a Focus Group on 'Living with Incontinence' and from that we going to carry out a joint survey with the Berkshire West Health Watch on local continence services. We also supported a focus

group on the role of epilepsy nurse specialists, to ensure commissioners have a patient perspective on that subject should they be able to secure funding for such a post.

Despite some setbacks in finding a suitable site for a Hydrotherapy Pool and Power-assisted Gym for Newbury/Thatcham, the directors of the company remain confident that they will succeed with the project. WBNA continues to work with, and support, partner organisations such as West Berkshire Disability Alliance and Independent Living Network.

Sadly, this is the last AGM I will be chairing for I am not standing for re-election. During my 13-year association with West Berkshire Neurological Alliance, I have seen the Alliance grow from an aspiring group into a solid organisation with a reputation for providing solid, constructive ideas for service improvements and collecting evidence from patients and carers using targeted surveys and focus groups.

Finally, it remains to thank our President, who sadly is also retiring at this AGM, and our Patrons for their support during 2010/11. I would like to thank all our committee members for all their hard work and especially pay tribute to John Holt for the tremendous work he has done for the Alliance over years and to thank him for the support he has given me.

David Roberts (Chairman)

13th September 2012