

A minister's on the turn

You may well remember how we welcomed warmly Health Secretary of State, Alan Milburn's, press release of 28th February, heralding a new National Service Framework (NSF) for long term health conditions, which he announced will have a '**particular focus**' on the needs of people with neurological disease and brain and spinal injury. We did not expect him to backtrack quite so quick. But we've had a general election since this first pronouncement!

Mr Milburn has since gone into black and white, saying that the NSF will merely '**pay attention** to specific neurological conditions'.

Both we and the national Alliance are very concerned by this. '**Paying attention**' is far removed from having a '**particular focus**'. On our members' behalf we have challenged his words and await his retraction.

And what are our needs?

Our proposed survey of neurology patients' needs has been on trial, starting with a version for MS sufferers. The survey will go shortly before Berkshire's ethics committee, prior to a full launch to patients. We will then roll the programme out to other neurological conditions. Berkshire Community Foundation have granted us £1k towards the equipment costs of the project, and our thanks to them for this support.

Our thanks also to Berkshire Public Health Department's Dr Nicky Cleave for her technical help with this project.

Specialist nurses, the emerging species

Having asked 42 NHS hospital Trusts across Central Southern England how many specialist neurology nurses they employ, and having

drawn more blanks than answers we have now a pretty clear confirmation of the lack of thought process in this area. We will be collating and submitting the data we have assembled and then will be pressing for a clear strategy for neurology nurses in Berkshire.

Therapy at the Sandlford Day Room

On 26th July our guest at our Open meeting was Carolyn Abel, Physiotherapy Manager for West Berkshire. We discussed the options open to us following the rejection by both Berkshire Health Authority and the Lotteries Board about funding our combined neuro therapies project.

Put simplistically, everybody who might have funds seems to think somebody else should pay! However the discussions and ideas raised in the Open meeting were lively and positive. We will be shaping up some fresh applications and re-submitting for funding for this important project. The topic led to the biggest turnout we have yet had at any Open meeting. Thanks to Carolyn Abel and everyone else for a constructive and productive session.

Newbury's new Hospital

The PCT remains confident that the new Newbury Community Hospital will open in April 2003. We are delighted to report that the disabled parking places have been moved closer to the main entrance, but have no new news beyond this. A trip to the old hospital to check the notice boards won't do you much good. It's the unchanged stuff that was posted last Autumn, telling us it's all go! As we've said more than once about this impoverished project, consultation, what consultation?

What's up at Reading?

Firstly at Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospital Trust the completion of the transfer of all services to the one site remains on target.

Also at the RBBH Trust a new report by the Commission for Health Improvement revealed 'lack of consultation with patients' as a weakness, and we have taken the chance to remind the Trust of our offers to help them.

Reading Primary Care Trust's Joint Investment Plan and Health Improvement Programme have been given the once over. There's not a lot about neurology in there, and this serious omission has been taken up with the authors.

Public Health under a cloud

On 24th May Guest speaker Dr Elaine Farmery, Public Health Consultant, Berkshire Health Authority, gave a most informative and entertaining address to our Open meeting. Her role covers, among others, implementation of government directives at local level, prevention of accidents, investigating health incidents, and conducting health surveys of various kinds, an example being the help she is giving us with our survey of the needs of neurology patients.

Health Board reorganisations herald a distinct possibility that nationally the number of Public Health posts may reduce. Promotion prospects within the service look bleak, giving long term concerns about recruitment and effectiveness.

Pathways and Post Codes.....

The NSF for the Elderly requires a local Care Pathway for Stroke to be developed, an important learning opportunity in the run up to the NSF for neurological conditions. It is our good fortune our Chairman is involved already. The end result should be better uniformity of provision and we will not rest satisfied until the 'Post Code Lottery' is eliminated.

Ideas from other regions

We attended a meeting of regional alliances in Lincoln recently which confirmed that lack of services is not unique to West Berkshire. We exchanged a number of ideas and intend to keep in good contact with regional colleagues .

Snippets

Honours. One of our Patrons, Professor Susan Greenfield, has been appointed to the House of Lords, while Patron Professor Pam Smith has moved to a prestigious Chair at Surrey University. Our congratulations go to both.

Fund raising. A collection day at Tesco raised £454 and was a very successful first outing for us with the public. Thanks to all who took part.

Grants. Our thanks to Thatcham Town Council and Laing's Charitable Trust for grants to help cover some of our costs for the coming year. Well done to our fund raisers.

Conference/study day. Research into the idea of us hosting a neurological conference or study day in West Berkshire continues, and there seems to be strong support for the idea.

Diary dates to note:

Our **AGM** will be on **Thurs. 27th September** at 1930 hrs at the Mencap Centre, Enborne Road. **Dr Christine Collin** is guest speaker.

Thurs. 29th November. Open meeting. 1400 hrs at St Joseph's hall. Speaker TBA.

Note your diaries now! All are welcome.

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