

Hydrotherapy Centre a step closer

A grant from the European Social Fund Grant of £10,000 has been awarded to WBNA to investigate the feasibility of building and running a hydrotherapy pool in West Berkshire. The Berkshire Community Foundation and the Berkshire Consortium administer the Global Grant scheme.

The possibility of a hydrotherapy pool was one of the first topics discussed at the newly-formed WBNA back in 1989 but then it was viewed as a pipedream. Now it comes closer to reality, and to drive the project a new partnership has been formed with West Berkshire Disability Alliance, Community Action West Berkshire, Berkshire Social Enterprise and the Greenham Common Trust.

A hydrotherapy pool will allow trained therapists to provide physiotherapy in warm and relatively weightless conditions. This environment allows some muscle use that is difficult to achieve on dry land and is beneficial for people affected by Stroke and long-term conditions, such as MS and Parkinson's disease. It can also be helpful to those with sporting injuries, pregnant mothers and in some cases aid recovery from broken bones and some forms of surgery. A pool in the right location could bring benefits to many people in the west of Berkshire.

A Feasibility Study is the essential first step in this enterprise. Several bids for the feasibility contract already have been received and it is envisaged that the study should be completed by December this year. The possibility of situating the pool at the site of West Berkshire

Community Hospital will be closely investigated. If the study indicates that a hydrotherapy pool is a possibility and a robust business plan can be prepared, Greenham Common Trust has agreed to contribute £750,000 towards making the project a reality.

Musical Chairs at the Health Trusts

Thames Valley strategic Health Authority has merged with Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to form the South Central Health Authority with a new chairman and chief executive. In addition, Newbury & Community PCT is merging with Reading and Wokingham to form the new Berkshire West PCT on 1st October 2006. This too is bringing major upheaval. None of the chairmen of the old PCTs has been appointed to the new chairmanship and the other directors will have to apply to join the board. An interim chairwoman has been appointed, while the NHS Appointments Board finds a new chairperson for the enlarged PCT. Additionally, the acting CEO for Berkshire West PCT is moving to become CEO at Buckinghamshire and the newly-appointed interim CEO does not wish to continue in the job. A permanent CEO should be appointed soon but meanwhile staff lower down the chain of command have to re-apply for their jobs. A new Berkshire West PCT headquarters may be in Theale. It is of immense concern to patients that there is so much upheaval and uncertainty at all levels in the health authorities. Inevitably, it means that important decisions will be delayed while the new directors and staff familiarise themselves with many problems, new initiatives and financial headaches facing the new PCT.

Healthcare Commission

The annual health check assessing the performance of the NHS is due out on October 12th. Gone are the old 'star ratings' to be replaced by a more comprehensive assessment giving a broader picture of how organisations are performing. Ratings will be in two parts; the first looks at the quality of services and the second the use of resources. The core questions in the first part are: how long are waiting times; how safe and clean is the service; how good is the care; are patients being treated with respect; does the organisation help keep you healthy? All these questions are relevant to patients with neurological problems and it will be interesting to see how our local trusts are performing, especially with regard to keeping you healthy. Please keep an eye out for the local results and let us know your opinions.

WBNA 2007 Conference

NeuroRehab 2007 and Beyond will be held on 18th April 2007. We now have a full complement of speakers and have finalized the programme for what promises to be our most exciting conference yet. Once again our line up of speakers includes leading national figures: including Baroness Susan Greenfield, and Professor Geoffrey Raisman FRS. The conference will explore the themes of interventions and preventions for a number of neurological conditions, as well as what it's like to be a patient. It will end on a controversial note with an open debate on the 'Assisted Dying' with contributions from Deborah Arnetts, CEO of Dignity in Dying, and Dr Rob George FRCP from the Palliative Care Movement. Brochures are being printed and should be with you shortly.

Disability Equality

West Berkshire Council is developing its Disability Equality Scheme 2007-2009 to be published later this year. To ensure that this scheme meets people's needs the council are holding a public consultation, '**What disables disabled people and how can we try and stop it?**' You must give views to the council by 7th October 2006. Consultation details and documents can be found on the West Berkshire website (www.westberks.gov.uk) or you can get a paper version from Joanna Richardson at West Berks Council (01635 519441 ext. 2441).

Diary dates to note:

This year we will hold the AGM at the Acland Hall, Cold Ash at 7.30 on Friday 29th September. Parking is good and access excellent. The format will be slightly different this year with the AGM, a couple of short presentations followed by a glass of wine and a finger buffet, giving you the opportunity to mix and talk to other people, so please join us.

Further dates for **Open Meetings**:

The next meeting will be on 9th November with a speaker from the Healthcare Commission. The first meeting in 2007 will be on 11th January speaker tba. Open Meetings are held at 1.45 for 2.00 pm at St Joseph's Church Hall, Newbury. Free admission includes tea and biscuits.

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