

Challenges Facing Neuro-Rehab

The count-down has started for our third conference. This event will provide an important opportunity for interaction between professionals and patients coping with neurological conditions. The talks will highlight new thinking and the latest scientific and technical developments on a range of neurological issues. Expert witnesses (patients and therapists) will give their perspectives and provide insight into the neurological journeys undertaken by: sufferers of brain and spinal injuries, those who have experienced stroke or have motor neurone disease. Delegates will have the opportunity for questions.

The day will conclude with a debate on the extremely controversial and emotive issue of 'assisted suicide'. This important subject is often ignored, but has been highlighted by some recent cases that have raised fundamental issues. We are very fortunate to have Deborah Annetts, Chief Executive of 'Dignity in Dying' and Dr Rob George, a consultant in Palliative Medicine and senior lecturer in Bioethics come to debate the issues. Both have recently been involved in briefing the opposing sides in the House of Lords debate on the 'Assisted Dying Bill' proposed by Lord Joffe. We are privileged that both are prepared to debate these issues with us.

Full details of all the conference speakers can be found on our website. There are still some places if you wish to attend the conference but to avoid disappointment please do not leave it too late. A brochure and application form is enclosed with this newsletter or you can obtain more information and download a form from our website www.wbna.org.uk.

Regional Services

We are pleased to hear that proposals which will drive the development of 'specialist commissioning' services have now been circulated by the new South Central Regional Health Authority. These proposals appear to offer a more dynamic approach than those that were previously outlined. This important group of centralised services includes: equipment for those with complex disabilities, spinal injury services, neurosciences, pain relief and several others.

Neuroscience Network farce

The Department of Health's National Service Framework (NSF) for Long Term Neurological Conditions clearly describes an expectation that every health area will establish its own Neuroscience Network. This expert body is to advise on the local implementation of services for patients with long-term neurological conditions. Following one meeting in Oxford towards the end of 2005 and two abortive attempts to set up a second meeting, nothing has happened. The reorganisation of the local health authorities has caused both of the proposed meetings to be abandoned. There is a critical need to get our local Neuroscience Network up and running, in particular to review access to services, workforce requirements and to plan commissioning. The lack of commitment from the top is inexcusable.

South Central Alliances Partnership

We are delighted to be working in partnership with Buckinghamshire Neurological Alliance and to have secured a small grant from FORZA to help develop an Alliance in East Berkshire. In addition there are moves afoot in Hampshire, with an inaugural meeting of a

Hampshire Alliance held on 13th March in Winchester. Any reader who wishes to become involved in these initiatives should call John Holt on 01635 33582.

Support for brain tumour patients

Recently we have heard some good news about improvements in support services. The Royal Berkshire Hospital, now a Foundation Trust, has taken the initiative and set up a service to support patients with brain tumours. A Clinical Nurse Specialist, Nicky Sillwood, has been appointed and she will work alongside the team providing support and information for people with brain tumours, skin cancer and sarcomas (cancer of connective tissues such as bone and cartilage). Nicky will provide a range of services for patients, including symptom control and psychological support. There will also be some support for families and carers; Nicky will even advise on how to obtain financial benefits.

Nicky Sillwood has said "Most of the patients I see need a huge amount of support from day one. People with brain tumours may have physical and cognitive disabilities and they are often devastated by their diagnosis." Nicky Sillwood will be developing her role in the coming months, including developing services to provide continuous and multi-disciplinary care for patients.

Hydrotherapy Pool for West Berks

Following publication of the feasibility study on building and running a pool in the West of Berkshire, WBNA has been assimilating advice in the report. There have been a number of developments which need to be taken into account; not least the fact that West Berkshire Council is locating three schools onto one campus in Tilehurst and are at the

consultation stage for building a hydrotherapy pool on the new site. WBNA is continuing to work with its partner organisations to find the means to provide this important community facility in the Newbury/Thatcham area.

Race-day Collection

Newbury Racecourse has very kindly offered to allow WBNA, and a number of associated charities, the opportunity to collect charitable donations from race-goers as they leave after a race-day. WBNA will be organising a collection on Saturday May 19th in the late afternoon. We need to enlist the support of about nine people who are willing to stand at the gates for about ninety minutes to 'shake a bucket' and encourage punters to make donations. WBNA does not have a regular income and we rely on subscriptions and donations to provide income to support our work. Please consider offering your services to help us raise funds to cover our running costs.

Diary dates to note

Dates for **2007 Open Meetings**:
The next open meeting is planned for 10th May. The speaker and subject will be announced shortly. Further meetings will be held on 12th July and 8th November 2007. Open Meetings are held at 1.45 for 2.00 pm at St Joseph's Church Hall, Newbury. Free admission includes tea and biscuits. The Annual General Meeting will be held in September, date and venue to be confirmed.

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