

FRIENDS OF DAVENPORT HOUSE

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2020/2021

Context

At a Special General Meeting in October 2018, members agreed that the Patient Group should become a charitable trust to be called Friends of Davenport House. All communications with members would be online and subscriptions were cancelled although members were encouraged to turn their subscriptions into donations. Although confident that with your support we were right to make these changes, we were unsure how they would work in practice. They did work very well, as explained in the 2019 Annual Report, and the trustees looked forward to developing a broader programme in 2020. This would include residents generally in the Harpenden area as well as patients at Davenport House, supported by a generous grant of £5,000 from the Childwick Trust, awarded in August 2019, and then supplemented by £2,000 in January 2020.

What we had not anticipated, along with everyone else, was the arrival of the covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 with its lockdowns and other restrictions on face-to-face contact and its continued existence through a series of waves of infection linked to different variants of the virus right up to the present time. As will be explained, this situation has restricted our activities and upset our planned sequence of annual general meetings which were traditionally held in the March of each year.

The last AGM, held on December 16th, 2020, had been delayed from March 2020 in an effort to find an opportunity for a face-to-face meeting. These meetings had proved very successful not least because they allowed relaxed contact between patients and doctors outside surgery appointments. But no opportunity arose because of the continuing pandemic and the AGM had to be held as an online zoom meeting.

The Annual Report presented on that occasion, and accepted by the membership, covered 2019 with an additional note from the Chair describing some of our activities during 2020. The AGM, technically due in March 2021 only three months later, was again postponed in the hope of holding a face-to-face meeting later in the year. Since such a meeting also proved impossible it was postponed once again until March 2022 so as to get the AGMs back in sequence whilst falling within the rules laid down by the Charity Commission. This report thus covers both 2020 and 2021 so that members can formally ratify the report for both years. In an accompanying document, the audited accounts prepared by the Treasurer also cover both years up to December 31st, 2021.

Activities

The main activities of the Davenport House Trust focus on the communication of accurate and reliable information on the functioning of the Practice and local health circumstances, largely through the Bulletin, and public meetings on medical talks provided by local hospital consultants and other specialists working in the health and care professions. The pandemic has meant the cancellation of these talks which we had planned to hold in the excellent facilities of the new Salvation Army Hall in Leyton Green when Rothamsted Enterprises increased their charges to a quite unreasonable level.

Instead, we have concentrated on producing shorter and more frequent Bulletins, 13 in total over the two years, covering a wide range of issues and, where appropriate, information on other matters such as that supplied by the Harpenden Health Primary Care Network (PCN) on progress on the local vaccination programme during 2021. More generally, the initiative taken by the Harpenden Trust and others to find volunteers to help deliver the programme in the Public Halls, including many from among our members, was very successful and much appreciated by the whole community and even commended by the Secretary of State for Health. In the February 2021 Bulletin, we also documented the considerable role played by the Davenport House surgery staff, both doctors and nurses, with Dr Thenuwara taking the lead on behalf of the Practice.

From the outset of the pandemic we have described on several occasions the changing use of online and telephone consultations with patients and in December 2021 we reported on the extent of face to face consultations conducted in the surgery and elsewhere. This approach to face to face consultations has not always met with approval from members but others have found the process has worked efficiently, saving them time in not having to attend the surgery, whilst receiving sound advice from the doctors when in conversation with them. At this point, I would like to thank Lindsey Wright, the Practice Operations Manager, for her extensive efforts in writing regular up-to-date pieces for the Bulletin at a time of rapidly changing circumstances in the Practice and Primary Care generally.

We have also sought to maintain a wider view. For example, in the October 2020 Bulletin, we encouraged members to take part in medical trials, a necessary step in the bringing forward of new medicines and treatments, not only in the context of covid-19 but also heart disease, cancer, diabetes and asthma. We have also encouraged members to become Friends of the Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust which incorporates Luton and Dunstable Hospital. Although outside our county, it remains the local hospital of choice for our members and in this regard I want to thank both John Harris and a former chair of our patient group, Malcolm Rainbow, for acting over many years as public governors for Hertfordshire on the board of the Bedfordshire trust, reminding the trust of its importance to us just across the county boundary.

More locally, last autumn we encouraged members to listen to the presentation made by the Central London Community Health Care NHS Trust about its plans for the re-furbished Harpenden Memorial Hospital (the Red House). The proper use of this facility has been long in the making and not unreasonably the plans were met with a degree of caution. The presentation successfully addressed some of these concerns. The Central London trust has a remit that extends across much of the county, as opposed to meeting the needs of Harpenden residents specifically, but there should be, at a minimum, benefits for local patients if only through the reduction in the number of long journeys to appointments that would otherwise have to be made to other parts of the county.

In trying to move with the times, we have improved our social media exposure and now have a Facebook page, which we would encourage you to join. Furthermore, if you are a Facebook user, we would also encourage liking the Davenport House Surgery and the Harpenden Healthcare PCN pages that are a great source of local announcements and information.

Governance

Over the two years, your managing committee of trustees have met on fifteen occasions to review progress. We have retained our links with the St Albans and Harpenden Patients' Group (SAPG), the National Association for Patient Participation (NAPP) and the Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning

Group (CCG) and continue to work closely with our Practice. At least one partner and the Operations Manager have attended almost all our trustee meetings. Unfortunately, the general lockdown and closure of the surgery have reduced those 'accidental and informal' contacts, so useful for maintaining personal links. Instead, we held additional conversations with some of the partners last summer to discuss some key issues in greater depth than is possible in regular committee meetings.

For example, in 2020 we donated in excess of £5,000 to the surgery to meet specific pieces of clinical equipment but in 2021 we changed our approach and decided to make a single donation of £8,000 to help upgrade the surgery telephone system, which was under considerable stress due to the increased number of telephone appointments, as we knew this would be of benefit to all patients. The Trust has also become extremely concerned at the lack of new members, especially younger patients, and we have been trying to find a way of ensuring that all new patients join the Trust as well as the Practice, and Bob Fletcher and Lindsey Wright are developing new means to achieve this. If we fail to achieve some improvement then the number of members, around 1,700 at present, will inevitably decline and we lose the benefit of having younger members with different agendas.

It is pleasing to note that throughout the last two years, in a period of staffing difficulties in many practices, for much of the time the surgery has been fully staffed, including the nursing team and those background staff whom we rarely see but are essential to the functioning of the Practice. There are more than 30 staff in total at Davenport House and they have not been immune from covid-19 either. As a training practice, Davenport House has a constant flow of registrars to work alongside the partners and it has also benefited from additional clinical support staff funded by the PCN. We share these staff with the other Harpenden practices. As reported in the February 2021 Bulletin, we have access to two social prescribers, three clinical pharmacists, two contact physiotherapists, and two Physical Associates, a new position in the NHS, who support the day triage team of the Duty Doctor and the Minor Illness Nurse.

Thanks

As you will know, last autumn I decided to step down as Chair of the Trust at the March AGM and so my thanks are a bit more extensive than usual. First, I must thank you, our members, for all the support you have given to the Trust, not least because many of you have continued to donate your subscriptions. This solid base of annual income allows the Trust to think more imaginatively about its future programme and these opportunities will undoubtedly increase when the levels of covid infection fall later this year. We have a number of patients who help us whilst not being trustees and I would like to thank Colin Noakes and Ian Farnsworth for acting as a source of advice on insurance and as Auditor respectively. One sad note to record, was the death in April 2020 of Geoff Mainwaring who with Dr Derek Bird set up the patient group nearly thirty years ago.

Second, the Trust could not function without the support received from the Practice, especially the partners. Additionally, I would like to repeat my thanks to Lindsey Wright as in these difficult times she has provided been the key link with the Surgery over the last couple of years. Her positive attitude and constructive approach have been a great help.

Third, the activities of the Trust cannot be delivered without the full-hearted commitment of the trustees. I cannot thank them enough for all they have done over the last six years. They have been instrumental in delivering our activities whilst also acting as an informal discussion group as we all have tried to cope with the consequences of covid-19 for the Surgery and its patients.

Finally, I am delighted to say that one of my colleagues, Simon Speirs, has agreed to become Chair. He will bring a new set of ideas and initiatives to what we can do for you at a time of considerable change in the NHS, especially the delivery of health and social care in Harpenden. I do hope you will continue to give him the excellent support you have given me.

Richard Munton

12th February, 2022