



## Chair's report for AGM 28<sup>th</sup> July 2020

As our Treasurer has explained, 2019 was a good year for our finances and also for our services.

At the front of the audited accounts you will see a report from the Trustees detailing our performance and achievements during the year, this will also be placed on our website. I would like to highlight just a few points.

We delivered amongst others, 3,850 sessions of physiotherapy, 1,144 sessions of hydrotherapy, 3,684 sessions of oxygen therapy, 2,689 sessions of complementary therapies (reflexology, Shiatsu and Bowen technique), 2,614 sessions of Action Potential Simulation (APS) therapy for relief of pain, 815 appointments with an MS Specialist Nurse and 93 sessions with a counsellor. The numbers were a significant increase on 2018 figures due to the hydrotherapy pool being in full operation, and high take up of other therapies.

We continued to provide long-term continuity of care to our members, of whom 40% have been attending the Centre for over 10 years. On the other hand, we receive regular referrals of people who are newly diagnosed, or who have recently decided to find out about the Centre. In 2019, 53 people visited for the first time, with 19 of those seeing the ways that the Centre could benefit them, and becoming regular attendees.

We completed the series of workshops funded by Central Beds Council for carers of people with advanced MS, and, over the six months, helped 119 people to avoid unnecessary hospital visits, to return home from hospital more quickly, to avoid going into a care home, or to feel less isolated at home.

Work carried out by our MS specialist nurses has resulted in a care pathway that sets out the best treatment for people with MS who do have to go into hospital. The pathway is a form of checklist that makes sure that general nurses understand the needs of patients with MS, and should result in a shorter, more beneficial stay in hospital. It is currently being trialled at Northampton General Hospital.

We have continued to develop our services by adding in more daytime exercise classes including Pilates. Some of these classes have been

continued online during 2020 with a very good following, and I'd like to thank Jenny and Jen for their willingness to take this on.

To turn to current times, it was a very sad day when we realised that we would need to close the Centre temporarily in March as the incidence of the coronavirus increased. It was very valuable to have the support and advice from our MS Nurses in making the decision to close, for the safety of our staff and members a few days before lockdown was announced.

Since then, Miranda has taken up a role with the Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group to provide community MS nursing from Bedford hospital for the first time. We will keep close ties with her, and will share knowledge and support for our members.

Emma remains employed by the Therapy Centre for one day a week. During the closure she has continued to provide valuable health advice and support to members over the telephone and by email.

We took the opportunity to place as many staff as possible on furlough as soon as we could. Up until then, staff members were working from home doing all sorts of jobs, and we are very grateful to them for their flexibility.

Tracy and Harriet, our managers, have been working from home the whole time doing some big pieces of work to make sure that the Centre is ready for our return. This has included making a lot of improvements based on a fire safety report, overhauling the system for delivery of oxygen to incorporate new safety measures, and turning their hand to the many queries and changes that have come up during the time. They have done an amazing job, and have shown their dedication to the best interests of our Centre.

During the time of closure we have kept in contact with our members through social media, our website, and a regular online newsletter. A significant proportion of the members have been called to check that they are OK, and to see if we can help in any way.

Our MS nurse, Emma, who also works at Northampton General Hospital, has carried out a survey of 12 patients who have accessed the NHS services whilst the MS Therapy Centre has been closed. Along with Emma's observations, and responses to an online survey of all members that we carried out in May, members reported that they had experienced increased fatigue, reduced mobility, increased sense of isolation, and some have resorted to taking new medication. Interestingly, of the 12 patients seen by Emma at the hospital, 10 had not accessed the service previously as they had been supported sufficiently by the MS Therapy Centre, thus demonstrating how we protect the NHS.

We know that many of our members, who are able, are looking forward to returning to their therapies. We will open on 5<sup>th</sup> August for a few days per week to begin with, and then increasing gradually. At the beginning we will provide Oxygen, Physio, APS and the gym by appointment, and then increase to hydrotherapy very soon. Once we see how everything goes, we will start to reintroduce the complementary therapies. We will continue with the online exercise classes, as these are much safer for people to attend from home.

It is thanks to Tracy that the Centre has been set up ready to welcome the members next week. She has worked extremely hard, and we are very appreciative of the time and effort that she has put in to this.

Harriet, our assistant manager and Karen our receptionist, have been working tirelessly to speak to all members to arrange for them to return to therapies. The appointments have been a complex task to set up, and we would like to thank Harriet and Karen for their tenacity.

We hope that all goes well in the next few months, and that things start to return to a sort of normality.

So, to the future plans. Our 5-year strategy implemented in 2015 was due for a revision this year. Trustees met with our facilitator, John Scott, in February, and a strategy for the next 5 years was in development before the pandemic hit. We have agreed that this will need to be revisited in the light of new ways of being, and so we will meet again in the autumn to see where we are. For now, we are focussing on helping our members as much as we can.

As Neil has described, we remain financially viable, but now more than ever, we rely on the backing of our members and supporters to donate what they can, until we can return to our usual fundraising activities. We know that our loyal volunteers are itching to get back to raising funds.

None of our therapies could be provided without the dedication of our wonderful members of staff and volunteers who have remained flexible and willing to do what is needed to get the Therapy Centre back up and running.

On behalf of the Trustees and the members, I would like to thank all of the staff, individuals, clubs, businesses, Trusts and volunteers who do so much to make our Therapy Centre the valued resource that it is.