



Chair's report for AGM 22 June 2021

It goes without saying that 2020 was an unprecedented year that required many changes to our usual service delivery.

In my address to you last year, I reported the numbers of sessions of various therapies that we had delivered in 2019. In 2020, however, it wasn't about numbers, but about keeping in touch with our members and rising to the challenge to provide therapies in a safe manner.

During the periods of closure, we found that our members reported significant decreases in mobility, confidence and independence, thus highlighting the impact that the MS Therapy Centre has on the lives of people living with MS.

Some people accessed NHS care where they would otherwise have come to us, demonstrating that we act as a first port of call for people with MS, and go some way to protecting the NHS.

At our AGM in July last year, we were on the brink of opening again. This went very successfully, with members being able to access one therapy each at the start. We had no cases of coronavirus arising from the MS Therapy Centre. Thank you to Tracy for organising and managing the procedures at the Centre, to Harriet and Karen for phoning everyone to arrange appointments, to Guy and Linda for their flexibility in delivering the therapies at the Centre, and to Annie for keeping us safe with her additional cleaning regime.

Volunteers have delivered oxygen therapy, as usual, and we are very grateful to them for their continued support. Other volunteers have worked in the background to support the Centre in the gardens and, more recently in our charity shops.

The number of people attending the Centre in 2020 who were newly diagnosed was reduced compared with previous years, and we will work hard to make sure that newly diagnosed people are contacted and offered support if they would like it.

We moved a good number of our services online: Our MS nurse, Emma, and counsellor, Gill, were available by phone, or email, and we had several different exercise classes either via video link, or live Facebook feeds, so that

there were 4 or 5 exercise classes each week. These sessions not only helped keep our service users active, but also provided a chance to meet up with others on a regular basis, albeit online. I'd like to thank all of our online exercise instructors, Jenny, Jen and Bridget for stepping up to the challenge.

We moved our newsletter to an online version, delivered by email, or via our website and Facebook, and made it monthly, rather than every quarter, in order to keep everyone updated.

In terms of fundraising, some of you may be aware of our online postcard-sized art sale organised by Bela Brown, which raised £3,000. This was a new venture for us, and was a welcome boost to funding and morale.

In other areas, Swarupa and Jane have done a fantastic job in finding any funding streams that were available.

We have now been open for nearly a year, gradually increasing services as restrictions allowed.

Currently, we are delivering a full set of therapies including hydrotherapy and complementary therapies, and Frank is running our minibus again. We are also setting up some more formal peer support sessions for members to meet in small groups.

We hope to be able to return to raising funds, indeed, we have some great challenge events going on at the moment, and our charity shops are now open, thanks to the volunteers who have been keen to get cracking again. We are hoping to run our charity sale again in July, and are optimistic that Bedford Park Concerts will take place this year. We need volunteers to help at the Proms concert on the Sunday if anyone is available.

We hosted an online art course, attended by some people living with MS, this was a great boost to wellbeing and companionship, and we hope to facilitate some more such groups in different interest areas, either online or, hopefully, in real life.

It is now time to think about the future:

In the near future we will invest more money to further upgrade the hydrotherapy pool to a larger size, with better access into the pool.

Changes in Fire Safety regulations now mean that we must be responsible for evacuating everyone from the building in the event of a fire. It is no longer acceptable to wait for the emergency services to arrive. In practice, due to the large number of people with mobility issues, this means that we must deliver all of our therapies from the ground floor.

We are now embarking on the task of working out how we can rearrange the layout of the building to make this possible.

It is important for us to now return to developing our strategy for the next five years, bearing in mind the changes that have taken place due to the pandemic.

The use of the building will be a significant factor in how we go forward, but areas that we are currently considering are:

- How do the new treatments available for people with MS affect the support that is needed?
- Is this particularly relevant for people who are newly diagnosed – what do they want from us?
- Is there a place for retaining some online services?
- How can we develop partnerships in the community in order to share resources and knowledge, and provide the best range of services for our members?

Once we can meet in real life, the trustees will consult with staff and members about the way forward.

I'd like to finish with some words of thanks - 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.

Furthermore, as Tracy has said, it was largely thanks to the continued support of our members that we avoided a deficit in 2020, and I would like to thank them for their loyalty in helping to keep the MS Therapy Centre afloat through this challenging year.