



NEWSLETTER

Spring 2021

I do hope that this newsletter finds you all safe and well. From day to day we seem to have been on a roller coaster – good news, followed by not so good news, followed by good news.

What a year 2020 was with all its ups and downs. Hopefully now that the vaccinations are being rolled out we will have a better 2021 and start getting back to normal – whatever that means these days. We will keep our fingers crossed that when summer arrives we can start booking our international holidays with gay abandon. Let's all look forward to a happy and healthy 2021!

We are thrilled to announce that Bournemouth Hospital Charity and Poole Hospital Charity have come together to create University Hospitals Dorset NHS Charity with effect from 1 April 2021.

The newly formed charity will operate across University Hospitals Dorset NHS Trust, hosting annual events, fundraisers and challenges to help support your local hospitals. It will also enable them to support a wider range of fundraising and provide more support across all three hospital sites

University Hospitals Dorset NHS Charity's mission is to enhance the care and treatment of patients accessing NHS services at Poole, Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals by fundraising to provide enhanced facilities, state of the art equipment and support NHS staff health, wellbeing and development.

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In this edition we bring you some remarkable stories of how, during the Covid-19 pandemic staff and patients alike have coped, adapted and come out the other side still smiling and the world may be a kinder place in general. We do hope that you enjoy reading their stories.

Finally, thank you to everyone that submitted their stories and we hope you enjoy reading them as much as we did.

Jenni Leighton, Editor

Love is still in the air - Mark and Jane's story continued...



We have been asked to give an update on our lives and plans. Just to summarise. Jane and I got engaged at the Robert White Centre on the last day of her treatment of radiotherapy. That was 31st May 2019 and so we then started planning our wedding.

I think our sense of timing has been interesting to say the least. We had drawn up a wedding list, had a reserve list and even a reserve, reserve list! The wedding was planned for the 25th July 2020 which was the third year anniversary of our going out. We wanted to give folks enough notice as we didn't send "save the date cards", so we thought we would send out mid-March which we did. The lovingly hand tied (Jane patiently sat and tied them all with ribbon) invitations went into the post around the 10th March. Lockdown then happened less than 2 weeks later. It soon became very apparent that things were going to have to change.

Jane eventually received confirmation that she would need to shield due to her Multiple Sclerosis. Not because she was/

is at greater risk of catching Covid-19 but because it was not clear how the MS would react to it and as her GP put it "we would rather not find out". So life in lockdown took effect. To be honest we quite enjoyed it. I was still working full time but doing this from home, my work actually got busier but it was good having more flexibility about when and how to work. We were able to go out for a walk in the countryside most lunch times and at weekends go for longer walks along the South Dorset Ridgeway. The weather was glorious and our healthy tans deepened. As April and May came and went and there was no easing in lockdown we were forced to consider what to do about our wedding. We didn't find it easy and agonised over what to do, we really want to be married but also the day is a very special one and we wanted to share that with friends and family. A tricky one!

At the time we took the decision we could only have I think 5 people at a wedding. So we decided that we postpone until next year and hopefully things may be rather different. The date we have chosen is the 31st May 2021 which will be of course 2 years to the day of Jane's completion of her cancer treatment and our engagement. We think that the wedding may still have to be very different to that what we wanted with fewer guests and a different type of celebration. Nevertheless to be married is what we both want more than anything, we recognise that we have found each other and the love we have increases and grows each day. To have found that special person is so amazing and we recognise that not everyone does. We have so many blessings and reasons to be thankful, and so much to look forward to. Life isn't always easy and without challenges I think we can say we are soul mates.



Refurbished Oncology Outpatients Department



We now have three new fantastic consultant rooms, which has helped us set up new clinics as space has always been an issue. This has enabled us to expand the service as specialist nurses are now able to undertake clinics in oncology outpatients, and new consultants have a room. The extra space also allows our registrars to work alongside their consultants and have the support and

education which the lack of space had previously not allowed.

We now have a dedicated specialist nurse room that is used for supporting patients and family members and allows them to catch up with work and they are able to administer chemotherapy medication within the department. We also have disabled toilet facilities and toilets that actually work now.

We are also the proud owners of a kitchen that is functional and supports the clinics by enabling patients and relatives to have a therapeutic cup of tea. The whole department has been transformed and we all feel proud to work in such a lovely area. We hope to hold an official opening ceremony when we can.



Shielding and Covid19



Max my little helper (not impressed with my note taking!)

My name is Mandy Sydenham and I am the Macmillan Prescribing and Review Radiographer/Treatment floor Team Lead and this is my personal journey through shielding during the Covid19 pandemic.

I think it is fair to say that we will not forget this year in a hurry. Old securities are gone replaced with new fears. The Dunkirk spirit re-ignited in many sectors of our communities. All of us facing the reality of Covid19 in their own, individual way. Isolation, loneliness, fear, confusion just some of the negative emotions associated with this time.

Here at the Robert White Radiotherapy Department we have continued. A new normal has emerged full of space, direction signs and PPE but as ever the Team remain dedicated, caring and professional. For me personally, it has been difficult, following a different pathway to the rest of the team.

That fateful day in March when a plain white envelope landed with purpose on the door mat, I knew it was a battle cry to take up arms andstay indoors!

Like many, I was 'requested' by the Government to shield. No going out, social distancing from others in the household and the worst thing for me, having the label of 'extremely clinically vulnerable'. What? Wait! Hang on a second, I'm not fifty yet (grant you, it is approaching faster than I want to admit). Don't get me wrong, I am not naive when it comes to my asthma. Diagnosed at 3 months old, I have adapted my life to suit my health and faced many challenges along the way. I am not after sympathy, however, for this is me, who I am. This label did still come as a shock. I didn't want this. I wanted to be a NHS Hero like my colleagues were. I was surprised how vulnerable I felt, how out of control I was. I wanted more than anything to be at work in the Robert White Radiotherapy department, yet there I was staring at a jigsaw, getting more and more frustrated at not finding the pink hat with the yellow bow.

It took a couple of weeks to set up home working and it was definitely a steep learning curve (hiking boots required). There were so many hurdles to overcome (swapping the hiking boots for trainers at this point!). Firstly, the dinosaur of a laptop, dug up from a dim and distant Radiotherapy past. On numerous occasions, I felt like throwing it across the room because I found out hitting the keys even harder made little in the way of difference to its effectiveness. Then there were the connection problems, which only seemed to occur at the most inappropriate moment. How dare Virgin Media cut me off for essential maintenance, did they not know I was working? Our poor IT specialist Pete must have dreaded seeing my number appearing on caller display. Next the big



question - How could I perform a clinical role from my dining room? The easy answer was I couldn't so with a tear in my eye I handed the running of the department to a very capable colleague. I become irrelevant, no longer part of the community and worse I felt dispensable. However, I am in the very fortuitous position of having another privileged role. I am the Macmillan on treatment review radiographer for the department and as such, I get to assess and support patient during their Radiotherapy.

Thanks to Covid19, all reviews were now telephone consultations. Yes! I had a purpose once more. So I chatted, assessed, consoled, advised, cried and laughed with those patients going through Radiotherapy during such an unbelievable time.

My daily conversations centred on bowel and bladder problems and skin reactions - but I loved it. Telephone consultations required adaptation and a different set of skills to face to face reviews and then there was Max, an 8 year old Miniature Schnauzer who was delighted at my

continual presence. He had an unrivalled ability to demand attention whilst I was on the phone but slept when not. Numerous conversations were disturbed by the squeak, squeak of his favourite duck toy or the manic barking to say the evil postman had dared touch his letterbox, hastily followed by apologies from me to the unsuspecting patient. I won't even go into home schooling and motivating a 15 year old, another time maybe!

After four months I am now back at the Robert White Building but still non clinical. The future is still to be written, we have all adapted, learnt a lot, and developed new coping strategies but we still face challenges and uncertainties. What have I learnt? I pondered this whilst drinking copious amounts of tea. This is probably the part I should quote one of the great thinkers of our time but I have decided to settle with this:

"We are all like tea-bags; you never know how strong you can be until you are in hot water!"

The perspective of the team at the Robert White Centre working during Covid19



Throughout Covid19 we have had to continue to adapt to the changes in

government guidelines. One of our biggest changes is the use of PPE. In particular, the use of surgical masks goggles and visors. These changes have made it particularly hard for patients to identify us, so to make it easier for everyone we decided to make a photo wall of us in "before" and "after" stages with our names attached. We felt that the patients have liked this addition because it makes them feel at ease as they can see the person behind the PPE. We also felt adding personal touches like this, around the department, has certainly lightened



the atmosphere at an already difficult time. After talking to some of the patients, we realised that for some of them, this was the first bit of social contact that they had experienced in months, which meant we worked extra hard at turning this into as much of a positive time as possible. Something we did to achieve this was a moral boosting 'Tropical Day' where, if patients wanted to, they could come in wearing their most exciting tropical shirts.

This was a bit of fun just to take everyone's mind off what was going on outside of the department. This went down very well and patients and staff alike got involved!

Initially at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic there was a lot on uncertainty and fear. Although we found this worry was more centred around our patients and less so about ourselves.



A year of COVID19: Dr. Mike Bayne

March 2020 and the holiday of a life time to the Himalayas was planned, re-planned and then planned again.

Downscaling from the Himalayas to the Alps, the Cairngorms and then finally Dartmoor where we grabbed three nights before lockdown savouring hiking on the remote moor far from the maddening crowd and isolated from the rapidly evolving news story.

We returned to find the house filling with young adults as our children returned from University and city centre flats to spend lockdown in Dorset. The house became a call centre as the medical student, lawyer, accountant and advertising exec all learnt to

Our biggest concerns throughout, has been whether patients will have to delay their treatments or miss them completely and we wondered what this would ultimately result in. There was so much talk in the media about many patients having their treatments cancelled that we wondered if this would happen in radiotherapy too. We have therefore been so relieved here at the Robert White Centre that patients have been able to continue to come in and receive their radiotherapy while also continuing to keep up good spirits.

The department itself is the perfect place to provide a safe environment due to its spacious and well thought-out design. The whole attitude here at the Robert White Centre has been fantastic, both patients and staff have been so supportive to one another and it has made the whole experience so much easier.

work from home. The days for them revolved around exercise, food and work on a screen.

My wife Pip, a physiotherapist no longer able to work due to Covid rules, threw herself into making everything in the house run like clockwork, navigating the increasingly complicated shopping and trying to keep up with the food and alcohol consumption. I felt very fortunate to be able to go to work and yet still have the company of the family at home. The sun seemed to be always out and, in Dorset at least, it did not seem too bad.

As the weeks went by though, the impact on our patients became clear. It took time for us to become effective with video and telephone consultations and for some remote assessment is just not possible. Delays in diagnosis became the normal and treatment



programmes dictated by COVID rules, rather than high quality evidence became routine. Nonetheless there was a strong feeling of making the best of the situation, all working together and the optimistic hope that summer would come and we would look back and think 'that was tough but look at what we can achieve when we have to'. The changes in working practice and improvements in IT offered real benefit to both patients and staff as we gradually returned to the new normal in August

In September we rebooked the cancelled holidays. In October I felt proud to have been part of the team of examiners that for the first time managed to deliver the final oncology exam for soon to be consultant oncologists remotely. Based at the Royal College of Radiologist in central London, working in our bubbles, we examined via video link doctors from all over the UK and with the benefit of IT could extend the exam to doctors in Hong Kong. The importance of the bubbles soon became clear as one of the examiners tested positive but the R value in the group stayed at zero with the rest of us staying free of the infection.

In November we cancelled the rebooked holidays. As we all now know the end of summer was the lull before the storm in Dorset with rates of infection far higher over Christmas than with the first lockdown. We have however all learnt to live with the new normal. Doing clinics from home and even completing complex radiotherapy plans whilst isolating at home is all now possible. Something we really could not have imagined a year ago.

Although clearly the negatives of COVID are enormous and it may be years before they are fully appreciated, there have been positive impacts and focusing on these helps us work through the darker days. I do not think I will ever have to sit on the A31 on a Friday night in the rain again after a meeting in Southampton as I can participate just as fully and effectively from Dorset. When I set up an education session for the Junior doctors or the wider cancer centre staff, its benefit is not

limited to those who can fit in the seminar room but any one where ever they are can participate. When I get stuck with interpreting a complex scan in radiotherapy planning, I can share my screen with a radiologist and use their expertise to gain clarity. When the video clinic system is working (which is certainly not all the time) I get the benefit of seeing a patient in their home environment giving me quite a different insight into the impact of their illness on their life. Rather than fixing patients in my memory by their diagnosis or physical signs, I can picture their living room, kitchen, conservatory, garden or even pet.

Spring will come and the infection rates will subside and I hope we can return to normality at home and at work. We will appreciate the face to face contact with patients and colleagues that much more and make the most of every clinical interaction but also realise that there is so much more that we can do remotely. Patients do not need to sit in queues of traffic, get frustrated by a lack of parking then wait for a 5 minute consultation that could have been better carried out with them in the comfort of their own home. There can be more space and time for those that really need it.

What would Robert White have thought of all of this? Well I am sure he would have been pleased to see how the capacity to treat patients in the Robert White Centre in Dorchester has relieved pressure, helping us sustain the radiotherapy service for Dorset despite the adversity. Equally he would have been impressed by some of the improvements in IT. He would however have wanted so much more and would be calling out for better more efficient technological solutions and more staff to facilitate delivery of treatment in patients homes. When the wifi goes on the blink, or the computer says the storage is full, that would have not been good enough. We must continue to think like Robert and only accept the best for our patients always looking for innovative strategies to expand and improve the treatment options for the cancer patients of Dorset.



Contact

To subscribe to our free, quarterly newsletter or keep up to date and help us to continue with the amazing, innovative work being undertaken in Robert’s name please contact us. Alternatively you can complete the tear-off slip below and hand it back to the Receptionist or pop in the mail.

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In light of the new Data Protection regulations that came into force in May 2018, the Robert White Legacy Fund part of the University Hospitals Dorset NHS Charity (registered Charity Fund No. 1057366), would like to keep you informed of our news, activities, events and appeals. If you would like to receive these, please tick below to **OPT IN**. Once completed, either hand back to the Receptionist or pop into the mail.

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Get involved as a volunteer or want to host an event in Robert’s name

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT

