

**NOVUM HEALTH PARTNERSHIP
BARING ROAD BRANCH PATIENTS' GROUP**

**Online Annual General Meeting: 28 January 2021
6.00 p.m.**

MINUTES

Present: Lee Walker (LW, chair), Patrick Connolly (PC, vice-chair), Robert Thompson (RT, minute taker), Janet Thompson, Paul Howell (PH), Anthony Atherton (AA), Bob Blunden (BB), Pat Blunden, Jan Gimble, Suzy Wilkinson (SW), Dr Judy Chen (Novum), Jane Cullen as guest speaker.

1. Before beginning formal business, LW outlined the etiquette for conducting online meetings in terms of waiting for cues to speak, minimising background noise, muting devices when not speaking and so on.
2. LW then welcomed and introduced everyone who had signed in to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Pauline Garrod, Elaine Curley, Maureen Bishop and Jeanne Mynett.
3. The minutes of the 2020 AGM and of the previous ordinary meeting on meeting on 17 December 2020 were accepted as accurate records.
4. Matters arising from either set of minutes not covered later in the agenda:
 - i. It was noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2020 are not on the Novum website: they will be sent again, with a request to publish them there.
 - ii. AA has received a reply from the Practice Manager about ICT problems, suggesting that he contact the IT specialist at BRMC. He passed on another patient's dissatisfaction with responses from the practice.
5. Guest speaker: Jane Cullen

Jane introduced herself as an exercise teacher who particularly focuses on long-term neurological conditions such as Parkinson's Disease. As an author, she drew upon related themes in *Say that Again*, a novel written to increase awareness of the condition and to raise funds for Parkinson's-related programmes.

The talk outlined research into the effects of diet and exercise upon health and longevity. In some areas of the world, identified as 'blue zones', people routinely remain active and independent up to and beyond the age of 100, experiencing a low incidence of cancer, heart disease and Alzheimer's. The outstanding areas in this respect are Japan, Sardinia and parts of Costa Rica. The common feature these 'blue zones' share is a whole-food, plant-based diet including rice, beans, lentils, pulses, fruit and vegetables as well as, in Sardinia and Costa Rica, wine in moderation.

The lifestyle of these areas seems to increase 'health span' as well as life span, and Jane emphasised that her focus is on extending active, healthy life.

She then moved on to the benefits of exercise, referring to research by Shane O'Mara, a professor of experimental brain research at Trinity College Dublin and author of *In Praise of Walking: The New Science of How We Walk And Why It's Good For Us*. Describing walking as 'the superpower you didn't know you had', Professor O'Mara cites research in which brain scans show clear positive effects in people who walked briskly for 45 minutes on five successive days; this and other investigations show a range of benefits from walking which suggest that doctors should include it amongst other 'social prescribing' options. Other research suggests that, at least amongst those already very fit, continuing to exercise in later years is highly beneficial, giving some credence to the idea that 'getting older is inevitable, but ageing is optional'. A comparison between two groups of long-distance cyclists, one aged 50-69 and the other over 70, found no evidence of ageing in the older group.

Jane then moved on to the benefits of weight training, pointing out that a combination of cardiovascular and resistance exercise burns more calories than cardiovascular alone. Resistance work is especially worthwhile for post-menopausal women because of its benefits for bone strength and blood pressure, and there is some evidence that it has a positive effect in recovery from breast cancer.

The posture and balance of patients with long-term neurological conditions can be greatly improved by appropriate exercises, and social prescribing should signpost patients towards activities in which they can both engage in suitable activities and meet other people. Physical activity is a good way of addressing depression, loneliness and anxiety; in addition, Jane's classes include deep breathing exercises, which have both mental and physical benefits.

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LW thanked Jane on behalf of the group for this interesting and wide-ranging talk. A question was asked about recovering fitness after a break from exercise due to injury or illness: Jane explained that 'muscle memory' enables fitness to be regained fairly quickly, suggesting that it might take about six weeks.

6. Practice report

Dr Chen apologised for the lack of a written practice report, due to staff sickness and other issues. Her in-person report and responses to questions covered the following points:

- i. The Covid vaccination programme has involved a major commitment both in administration and in the provision of staff. Vaccine is delivered with two days' notice and has to be used within five days of arrival, thus requiring intense activity in arranging appointments, and all vaccinations are currently carried out by GPs and experienced nurses, which of course means that they are unavailable for other work. Newly-trained vaccinators are not yet being used, for reasons including the complexity of handling the Pfizer vaccine in particular, though specially-trained HCAs will be brought in soon.
- ii. There is concern about a low uptake amongst BAME communities, especially in view of the greater vulnerability of some groups to the virus. The demographics of Lewisham

mean that this has a marked effect on overall uptake, but Novum compares well with similar practices.

- iii. GP practices are not allowed to set dates for second vaccinations, although some members of the group had received such appointments from hospitals, which appear to operate under different rules. Dr Chen accepted that this inconsistency adds to patient anxiety, and pointed out that having to make a separate second appointment in the future effectively doubles the practice's administrative burden.
- iv. Both the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccinations are offered at the Downham hub. Vaccinations have been administered to residents and carers in care homes and to the housebound, and have been offered to the over 70s. The practice is not allowed to move on to other priority groups without government direction; it does have to make every effort to chase up patients in already-eligible groups.
- v. No vaccine has been discarded.
- vi. An outbreak of Covid 19 at Rushey Green meant that the branch had to close for a time in December (two related positive tests constitute an 'outbreak'). As a result, most RG activity had to be online; face-to-face appointments were moved to Baring Road, but no transfer of staff was allowed. The practice is currently awaiting test results for other staff.
- vii. No problems have so far arisen from the consequences of leaving the EU.
- viii. Flu vaccinations continue to be offered, although this activity has been restricted by prioritising Covid. Patients are still actively encouraged to have this vaccination.
- ix. Dr Chen encouraged use of the Ask NHS GP app, uptake of which is about 20%. The app offers a range of services and provides a means of remotely accessing NHS provision without adding to telephone traffic.
- x. The website design continues to be a problem, shared with many other practices. It was agreed that a survey amongst patients could be carried out to collect suggestions for improvement.

Dr Chen was thanked for her comprehensive report and detailed answers to questions. Members who had already received a Covid vaccination commended the efficiency of the operation, noting only that there was some duplication with offers of vaccination from hospitals as well as the practice.

7. Feedback on Breathing Exercise/Long Covid 19 proposal

The proposal was welcomed. It was agreed that the existing summary of feedback (attached) should be forwarded as it stands.

8. Chair's report to the AGM (attached)

LW presented his already-circulated written report (attached). He expressed the group's appreciation to Dr Chen of both her work for the practice and her engagement with our group, and his own satisfaction that the group had managed to function remotely during the pandemic. As always, however, there are concerns about those unable to take part using ICT.

The group received Lee's report most warmly, and thanked him for his work as Chair, particularly in keeping the group active during this difficult year.

9. Election of Chair, Vice-Chair and Note Taker for 2021

Chair: Patrick Connolly (nominated RT; seconded BB)

Note taker: Robert Thompson (nominated BB, seconded PC)

As no-one offered to act as Vice-Chair, it was agreed that the post should remain vacant and that the group should offer collective support to the Chair.

10. AoB

- i. SW drew attention to a Nordic Walking group available in Lewisham (something clearly related to the talk this evening). She will provide the Chair with contact details if anyone is interested.
- ii. PH asked about earlier attempts to expand the Patients' Group; at previous meeting we had been told that around 20 people had expressed an interest in joining an online group, but nothing else had happened.

There are clearly good reasons for recruiting a wider range of members in terms of age and ethnicity, but the advantages of wider engagement need to be weighed against the difficulties of managing discussion, especially online. It was nevertheless felt that everyone who had expressed an interest should be invited to join, on the grounds that some will not in the end be able to do so and attendance always fluctuates; however, it was also agreed that some kind of 'role description' should be prepared to ensure that new participants understand the purpose and responsibility of the Patients' Group.

Dr Chen undertook to look at the list of potential participants and discuss the way forward with the new chair.

The meeting was declared closed at 7.15 p.m.

Next meetings: Thursdays 11 March, 22 April, 3 June, all online at 6.00 p.m.