

The Lindsay Leg Club Foundation and the Mottingham Leg Club, Bromley, London

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A social model of healthcare; members not patients; nurses and volunteers working together; a smile and a chat; plenty of coffee, tea, biscuits and homemade muffins; approachable nurses; solutions not chronic problems.

What does all of this mean?

I first became aware of the Lindsay Leg Club Foundation while attending an awards lunch in Staffordshire. From across a crowded room, Ellie Lindsay was pointed out to me. We may have only spoken briefly, but this was the beginning of our working friendship. Gradually over the next few years, we met more and more often. I visited the Mablethorpe Leg Club in Lincolnshire and started attending the Leg Club annual conference dinners, Medical Technology Group meetings and All Party Parliamentary Group sessions.

Eventually I became a Friend of the Foundation, which meant that I had a formal association and the desire to further the objectives of the Leg Club model.

A NEW LEG CLUB IN LONDON

When the Mottingham Leg Club opened in September 2012 in south-east London, this gave me a chance to use what I had learnt about the Foundation and help as this new club was being set up. I attended the official opening, which coincided with the first Leg Club session. The occasion was marked by the attendance of a local councillor, a local GP, representatives of the Foundation Industry Sponsors, and NHS and Bromley Healthcare clinicians and senior management. Speeches were made and refreshments were provided; and while speaking to a few inspirational community nurses, I hoped this might be the opportunity for me.

So, on several Wednesdays each month, I take the train into London and make my way to the Court Farm Evangelical Church hall – a healthy 25 minute walk from Mottingham train station. I'm a part of a small team of volunteers who prepare the hall, set up the medical equipment,

assemble the supplies, put out the refreshments, get the medical records ready, display leaflets at the reception table and, most importantly, welcome members and assist the nurses.

I felt quite tentative at first because my knowledge of chronic leg problems and ongoing care was minimal. I don't remember if any NHS patients attended the club on that first Wednesday, but if some had, they would have been the first members. Gradually over the next seven months 44 patients have been referred to the Mottingham Leg Club. Currently about a dozen members receive treatment each week. The types of treatment range from straightforward leg washes and stocking replacements, Doppler assessment and bandaging to extreme circulation problems requiring complex consultation and discussion. However, our members don't just receive medical care, they also receive a pleasant dose of what membership in a social club has to offer.

As a volunteer receptionist, I greet the members as they come in, try to keep track of who has arrived and when, settle them at the communal tables and offer them something to eat and drink. While they wait to receive treatment, the members talk amongst themselves, ask questions of the volunteers and nurses and watch what's going on in the hall.

SETTING UP THE FUNDAMENTALS

Over the months, as the nurses continued to treat new and existing patients and numbers grew, the volunteer committee worked in the background to establish the administrative side of the Leg Club. We are slowly setting up a bank account and agreeing a constitution. Fundraising is not an immediate necessity because for the first year Bromley Healthcare has provided enough money to cover the hall rental (£15/hour), equipment, medical supplies and refreshments. In addition, as usual with a Leg Club, the community nurses, trainee nurses and clinical specialists are supplied by the local healthcare provider, in this case

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Bromley Healthcare, and occasionally supported by representatives of Leg Club Industry Sponsors.

Our members have been referred to the Nottingham Leg Club from the local leg ulcer clinic, by local GP practices, community nurses, and as a result of personal research and local promotion. After being registered and treated, our patients become automatic members of the Nottingham Leg Club. Membership entitlement includes stimulating medical and non-medical conversations, hot drinks, store bought biscuits and homemade muffins and a growing circle of friends.

AMAZING OUTCOMES

I marvel at the changes that have taken place since September and I'm not just referring to medical outcomes. However, I will describe some near miracles! Two men came in, one old and the other young, and neither could tie their shoes. Within several weeks, their weepy and/or swollen legs and ankles had dried out and returned to relative normal contours and health. The young man in particular had previously been told that “nothing could be done; just live with it”. It's not much of a life if you can't get about.

Two other members, a very elderly woman and a not quite so old retiree, with complex medical conditions, had suffered from chronic leg

complaints and diminishing social contact over an extended period of time. Because of the treatment received by the nurses at the Leg Club and the encouragement of the volunteers, both are healthier and happier now. Multiple members come each week to have their legs washed and stockings replaced, and to enjoy the social element that a club provides.

Two of our particularly shy members can't wait to come in and continue conversations started the previous week. And lastly, two older women struggle in on crutches each week – one drives and the other comes by taxi – and just their repeated appearance seems like a minor miracle. One is recovering mobility after many, many months of hospitalisation and the other is preparing for a hip replacement.

I am humbled by the determination of all of these individuals. I am equally amazed by the efforts of Gill and Michelle, and their team of dedicated nurses. Michelle skips lunch, Gill eats as she drives and semi-retired Lynn comes from Maidstone. Gill and Michelle juggle the demands of their original workload and the increasing demands of a growing Leg Club.

Last month, as a part of her annual UK Leg Club visits, Ellie Lindsay and George Peach (a vascular surgeon from St Georges) came to visit. We were quite honoured to show them how much we had accomplished since September 2012 and the members, nurses and volunteers appreciated the opportunity to talk to Ellie and George.

Following the visit, Ellie said: “Meeting the volunteers and members was a joy and the staff were extremely committed to delivering holistic care.”

In a small satisfaction survey of members recently conducted at the Leg Club, the average ratings (on a six point scale) for friendliness and quality of care were 5.4 and 5.3 respectively. I hope that we can further analyse the survey results soon, and after the first year compare the costs of the Leg Club versus what the alternative would have been for our members. Patients who are fully engaged with their nurse, and their treatment, are bound to enjoy faster healing rates and improved management of their chronic health problems.

I hope I've answered the question at the beginning of this article!

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Some of the nurses, members and volunteers at the Nottingham Leg Club.
Left to right: Kathy, Karen, Lynn, Diane, Annabelle, Christina, David and Dawn.