

Looking back on the Lindsay Leg Club Foundation 2023 highlights

As the clock strikes midnight on the 31st of December, I am sure I am not alone in making New Year's resolutions, with the aim of improving one's lifestyle after overindulging during the festive period. However, having struggled over past years to maintain my well-intentioned improved lifestyle declarations, which sadly had a habit of lasting less than a week, I elected to abandon the well-meaning resolutions completely and, instead, contemplate on the past year and move productively forward in 2024!

On thinking about 2023, it certainly was another busy year within the Leg Club community, and with so much going on and many changes taking place, it was even more important to reflect on all that's been happening with the Leg Clubs and the Foundation.

Concentrate on loneliness!

The societal issue of loneliness, depression, social poverty and isolation among all age groups is now a widespread universal predicament. We all have a natural psychological need to belong socially, enabling us to cope with the realities of our lives. As a society, we all depend on each other, and meeting and conversing virtually remains unfamiliar to many, as non-verbal communication and facial expressions are important languages that are greatly missed. Over time, direct social communication has almost disappeared.

Social connectedness is incredibly important for all age groups, especially the elderly, as many may have reached retirement age. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), most developed countries have accepted the chronological age of 65 years as the definition of an elderly or older person. However, loneliness and social isolation affect people of all ages. While it may pass for some, for others, it can persist, having a significant impact on their everyday lives.

The psychosocial Leg Club model is a model of care that provides face-to-face services specifically tailored to meet the needs of people in the community who suffer from lower limb-related conditions. Unlike traditional clinical settings, Leg Clubs are clinically-led clinics held in non-medical settings such as village halls or community centres, similar to family planning centres, drug/needle exchange centres and

homeless centres. This community-based approach is central to the Leg Club model.

In addition to delivering outstanding treatment, the key point about Leg Clubs is that they bring communities together, in an environment that enhances quality of life. They address the holistic needs of individuals across various age groups requiring care. The person-centred approach to treatment of lower limb and leg ulcers acts as a catalyst to create a new sense of community, re-socialising people who have become isolated due to a debilitating condition and providing opportunities for individuals to play a significant voluntary role within their community. This philosophy is being embraced by lateral-thinking NHS professionals who perceive the need for action within the community they serve and undertake the model as a change agent.

Hence, the importance of the Foundation is to promote an integrated community through the collaboration of community volunteers, patients, families and the multidisciplinary healthcare service. By bringing people together in a social environment, it reduces social isolation, encourages social integration, helps create support networks and gives focus to people's lives. It ensures better healthcare outcomes, quality of life, and improved mobility. Individuals attending their local Leg Club become more active and participate more fully in society.

It's always a pleasure to acknowledge the outstanding work of the wonderful Leg Club volunteers who send photos and news on how they like to celebrate national events, such as



Ellie Lindsay
Life President and Founder
of the Lindsay Leg Club
Foundation



Figure 1

Figure 1: Broadstone Leg Club celebrating their Christmas festivities

For more information on the Leg Club Foundation please visit the website: www.legclub.org

the multi-award-winning Best Foot Forward Leg Club, who held a party for the King's Coronation, where volunteers dressed up as Hula girls and provided a fantastic occasion for the Leg Club members and all involved within the Club community. As one volunteer has said, "If we get one smile from the Leg Club members when we appear in our hula outfits then it's been worth it, and our day is made!"

Another example was when Broadstone Leg Club celebrated their Christmas festivities within their Leg Club community [Figure 1]. There's a certain level of camaraderie that comes with spending time with other volunteers, sharing a joint sense of purpose by providing a celebratory morning/afternoon for members who may well be spending time alone throughout the festive holidays.

Volunteer Awards Winners: Barry Newton, Heather and Roy Inchley – Devizes Leg Club

A belated celebration due to the cancellation of the 2022 conference, took place at the 2023 annual Leg Club conference dinner. It was an extremely emotional moment when the sterling work undertaken by Barry Newton, Heather and Roy Inchley were presented with their trophy by our outstanding Leg Club ambassador Trudie Clark. These richly deserving winners, who regularly help at the Devizes Leg Club, were recognised as overall winners of the annual Leg Club Volunteer Award. In recognition of this achievement, all three were invited to attend the Annual Leg Club Gala Dinner and Conference [Figure 2].

Two charities with equivalent goals

Just before the COVID-19 pandemic, I was invited to attend a meeting to present the psychosocial Leg Club model to Lorraine Brown, a Lymphoedema Nurse at the Royal Surrey Foundation Trust, along with her integrated team. Due to their team's enthusiasm to embrace change, they proceeded to open their Leg Club earlier this year. Naturally, the Foundation was delighted to see a lymphoedema specialist adopt the Leg Club model into her everyday practice. This was especially significant as the Leg Club Foundation has received outstanding public health promotion and educational support over many years, through initiatives such as the annual Leg Club conferences, as well as educational support provided by Rebecca Elwell and Natalie Phillips, BLS Trustees, who have attended Leg Clubs.

By recognising the synergy between the two organisations, the Leg Club Foundation was invited to actively participate via presentations and exhibitions, at the annual October 2023 British Lymphoedema Society conference.



Figure 2: Barry Newton, Heather and Roy Inchley being presented the outstanding Leg Club award by Trudie Clark

The topic I presented was 'Eliminating barriers in lower limb care through shared goals!' This was followed by Clare Mechen, the Foundation's Southwest external consultant and Leg Club lead for the multi-award-winning Best Foot Forward Leg Club in Poole, addressing the importance of the Leg Club model and community and collaborative working relationships. Additionally, Lorraine Brown presented on her Leg Club being introduced into the community she serves.

Both organisations have established an easy-going collaborative relationship aimed at increasing the benefits to patients, strengthening patient advocacy, and improving outcomes focused on quality of life. As two third-sector 'not-for-profit' organisations, the objective is to ensure that the resourcefulness and uniqueness of the charities remain focused and directed at the heart of patient-centred care, evolving continuously over time.

The collaboration between the two organisations is new, and we are currently exploring ways to achieve significant synergy through preventative health promotion and education. Hence, the importance of both charities working together for the benefit of patients.



On thinking about 2023, it certainly was another busy year within the Leg Club community...

The Medical Technology Group (MTG) is a coalition of patient groups, research charities and medical device manufacturers launched in 2000 to ensure that medical technologies are accessible to all who need them. The Leg Club Foundation has been an active member of the MTG, representing its members (patients), since 2005, and I am part of the MTG management committee. Since the introduction of the MTG annual showcase 10 years ago, the Leg Club Foundation has had the privilege of hosting an exhibition stand to showcase the Leg Club

portfolio of materials and disseminate the work of the Foundation. This year, our exhibition stand was exceptionally busy, with Mr Frazer Brown, the Foundation's external project consultant, and PA, Lynn Bullock, manning it [Figure 2 and 3].

This year, the MTG campaigned to raise awareness of the importance of utilising patients' lived experiences to better inform decision making within the NHS. Two reports were presented, highlighting best practice in meaningful patient involvement and calling for increased efforts across the NHS to leverage the potential of patient power in decision making processes.

Backing the call for greater patient involvement was Lord Markham, a minister in the Department for Health and Social Care, responsible for innovation, data and technology. He also discussed how digitally mature trusts (NHS England, 2023) were serving as benchmarks to drive innovation across the NHS. The MTG's 2022 backlog report had previously highlighted best practice in such innovation, enabling hospitals to treat up to three times as many patients.

David Lawson, Director of Medical Technology at the DHSC, also spoke on the need for more meaningful patient involvement within the NHS. "To make the best policy from a MedTech perspective, we need to engage with patients as much as possible" he stated, drawing on the impetus provided by the Government's new Medical Technology Strategy.

Dr Sam Roberts, from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), delivered an outstanding presentation, ensuring that patients remained at the heart of NICE documents. She commended the MTG's recent meaningful patient involvement work and called for patient groups to continue to feed in their experiences of medical technology to provide a better understanding of what constitutes excellence in healthcare.

The reception, hosted by Steve Brine MP, was an encouraging way to round off the year for the MTG, showcasing our influence in key areas of government policy, raising the profile of medical technology as a solution to the NHS's long-term problems. It was also a reminder to our industry and patient group members of the vitally important work they do in transforming patient lives. Before an audience of leading policymakers, clinicians and industry members, we heard from Maree, who explained how she had played a pivotal role in providing feedback and comments to both clinicians and the designers of her innovative hip and knee implants, which enabled her to undergo life-changing surgery.

The second speaker was Kim Purkis, an intestinal failure patient, a condition



Figure 3

Figure 3: The Leg Club Foundation stand with Lynn Bullock at the Medical Technology Group meeting



Figure 4

Figure 4: Ellie Lindsay and Frazer Brown in conversation with David Lawson

characterised by the inability to maintain a state of adequate nutrition or fluid and electrolyte balance due to an anatomical problem. Kim described her years of living with associated protracted devastating complications. Thanks to technology providing adequate nutritional support and to self-manage her care, Kim held aloft her parenteral nutrition pump and told the audience "This is what keeps me alive and has done for eight years".

As always, both speakers provided a powerful insight into the lived experience and importance of overseeing their own care, at a reception in which patient stories were at the forefront. It also served as a reminder to all attendees why timely and equitable access to the best available medical technology on the NHS is so important.

In conclusion, it was a privilege to be part of the annual MTG Showcase and to enthusiastically work alongside a board of esteemed colleagues who constantly strive to ensure the rights of patients are profiled within all areas of healthcare. For information, visit: <https://mtg.org.uk/patient-involvement/> ●

References

- NHS England (2023) Digital maturity assessment. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/digital-maturity-assessment/> (accessed 12 February 2024)
- The Medical Technology Group (2022) NHS Backlog Briefing <https://mtg.org.uk/campaigns/spotlight-reports/#backlogbriefing> (accessed 12 February 2024)