

HON SECRETARY'S REPORT  
FOR ROBINSON HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION FOR YEAR 2020

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This report for the 90<sup>th</sup> year of our Association will recognise the unexpected turmoil and changes to our Health Service and general lives caused by the Coronavirus Pandemic. Little did we know than an illness outbreak in China in Autumn 2019 would cause over 237 million recorded cases and possibly over 18 million unrecorded deaths worldwide.

Our whole country was forced into lockdown from March 2020. Of necessity our Health Service had to dramatically adapt their practices, infection control and safety procedures for patient care. Zoom and other platforms took on vital importance. University research departments in collaboration with pharmaceutical companies developed lifesaving vaccines in unbelievable timescale. Our Health Workers were called on to compassionately and selflessly face a Pandemic worse than any in living memory.

Margaret Allison in last year's Honorary Secretary's report paid a fitting tribute to our friend, colleague and esteemed previous Honorary Secretary of this Association, Dr John Johnston. I refer you also to the tribute to John so ably written by our VP Hugh Clarke and included in this year's AGM papers. John's untimely passing on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2020 brought to an end John's life of compassion, selfless service, loyal friendship and much valued inspiration to many who regarded him with enormous respect and deep affection.

I turn now to the reports from various Departments working on the Robinson Hospital site. They all started their reports by noting the extreme challenges caused by the Covid Pandemic.

**ROBINSON HOSPITAL GENERAL WARD** – Sonya Doherty, Assistant Director and Nurse Lead for Community Care, reports: "As a Team we urgently had to refresh skills to respond to the Pandemic. We were very proud to have our hospital designated as the only Covid Hospital Unit for step down and rehabilitation care in the NHSCT area. Ms Wendy Magowan, Trust Director of Operations, praised our Unit for the impact their care had made to the whole Trust area as the NHSCT could not have managed through the Pandemic without the Robinson Hospital care.

This has been a time of deep concern for our patients, their families, and of course our staff experienced fear and anxiety for their own wellbeing and that of their loved ones. Our Multi-Disciplinary Team is made up of Nurses, Drs, Health Care Assistants, Social Workers, OTs, Physiotherapists, Pharmacy Staff, Catering, Domestic and Administrative staff. All displayed determination, steadfastness and provided each other valuable guidance and support. We felt honoured to support our patients and their families. Their trust in us gave us courage to face difficult conversations which we often had to have.

Sadly we did experience the deaths of some patients. Often family members were unable to be present with their loved one during their final illness and death. A local knitting group knitted red hearts for each grieving family member to help cherish their loved one's memory.

Volunteer services at mealtimes and dementia companions had to be suspended. We continued to implement changes suggested from our Frailty Project reported last year. We congratulate Mary O'Boyle and her Team for being awarded a High Commendation in the 'Innovation and Best Practice' category by the Community Hospital Association UK.

Average length of stay was 29 days and 39% of patients were discharged home with support, 36% were discharged to care homes, and 14% required transfer to another hospital for further treatment. 11% remained in hospital for 'end of life care'.

Jackie Elliott, Causeway Locality Manager, Registered Nurse for 39 years and Lead Manager for Community Hospitals including the Robinson Hospital for 13 years, retired in June 2020. We are very grateful for her service and dedication.

Our Trust Board member, Dr Shauna Fannin, Medical Clinical Lead, reports; "Our Robinson Hospital Medical Team includes GPs from the 2 Ballymoney Practices, Armoy and Portstewart Practices. I would like to thank all these GPs for their care. Enhanced learning for managing Covid care was required and valuable co-operation established to work with Causeway Hospital and Palliative Care Consultants.

Not allowing face to face relative visits through much of the year was one of the most difficult parts of care. Window visiting had limitations. iPads donated by the Robinson Trust Board meant relatives could see and speak to their loved ones remotely which gave invaluable comfort."

Dr Fannin paid special tribute to Sister Joanne Montgomery and Deputy Sisters Sinead Smyth and Lorna Sharkey who led the team of Robinson Hospital Nurses throughout the year. She also noted that the Robinson staff appreciated the provision of food and support paid for by the Robinson Trust Board during the Pandemic.

**PHYSIOTHERAPY DEPARTMENT** – Lynne McCartney, Services Manager reported: "The physiotherapy team in the Robinson adapted well to the challenges posed by COVID 19 and worked alongside their multi-disciplinary colleagues to ensure our inpatients received the highest quality of rehabilitation as they recovered from COVID 19. They encouraged patients and empowered them to reach their potential through individualised specialist rehabilitation programmes and teaching patients to self-manage their conditions as they progressed.

The MSK outpatient services were significantly disrupted by COVID 19. The progress that had previously been made in waiting times has unfortunately slipped in 2020. Outpatient services had to adjust from solely face to face appointments and morphed to a hybrid of telephone/virtual and face to face appointments. The use of technology enabled the service to continue to assess and treat patients. There was also the added pressure of redeploying staff to pressurised areas on the acute hospital sites and to bolster community services. The service maintained sufficient capacity at all times to ensure all priority patients were reviewed but this also led to an increase in waiting times for other patients. The Hydrotherapy pool which is accessed by many physiotherapy services had to close and all group classes were stood down due to COVID 19 restrictions.

As the year progressed the service gradually moved towards reset and rebuild plans but further surges of COVID 19 will unfortunately once again impact on elective services. Despite these challenges the physiotherapy teams will continue to provide high quality services to our patients and as in the past year will continue to adapt to the ever changing environment we all find ourselves in.”

**HOSPITAL DIVERSION TEAM** – Catherine Skeet, Team Coordinator reported: “In the 5 years we had been based in the Robinson Hospital, we had been able to treat 4 patients at a time in our unit but due to Covid this was reduced to 2 per session. This meant more treatments had to be carried out at home. Despite restrictions our Team carried out 1,038 blood transfusion and other intravenous treatments in 2020.

I am grateful for all the support we receive from the Robinson Board of Trustees and wish to express a special thank you to the late Dr John Johnston who championed the purchase of a recliner chair which our patients find so comfortable whilst receiving lengthy treatments. We as a team still miss him”.

**CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTRE** – Dr Ruth Sutherland, Associate Specialist in Paediatrics reports: “This service is led by Dr Alison Livingstone assisted by Drs Sheenagh Cameron, Sinead Higgins, Carolyn McCandless, Ruth Sutherland and Shabaz Mirza. Our full Multi-disciplinary Team includes colleagues in Paediatric Physiotherapy, Speech and Language Therapy, Dietetics, Occupational Therapy and Clerical Staff. In 2020 there were periods of time we were unable to have any face to face assessments. We continued to consult with all our patients by telephone or Zoom. Our face to face contacts have now resumed in a safe environment”.

**CRUSE BEREAVEMENT CARE SERVICE** – Paul Sampson, Cruse Administrator reports: “Due to Covid our hospital based services closed completely for admin and counselling. Our 50 volunteer counsellors continued to work from home. The tele-friending service mentioned in a previous report makes valuable weekly contacts with isolated clients and those in early grieving process. During 2020 demands for our service ‘rocketed’ due to Covid when many relatives were unable to visit or be with their loved ones in their final illness or passing and restricted funerals meant less family support for those grieving.”

**THE HUB** – This Unit, used by a wide variety of Community and Support Groups, unfortunately had to close fully during 2020 lockdown and only partially re-opened with strict and limited clinical use in Spring 2021.

**ROOTS – ROBINSON OUTDOOR OCCUPATIONAL TRAINING SERVICE**- led by Valerie Craig, this service for adults with learning disability has an exciting story. They didn’t close during lockdown, had to reduce to 5 adults at worst lockdown and are now back up to a complement of 10 adults. Based at the Polytunnel area, they propagate plants from plugs for resale, maintain the hospital grounds exceptionally well, supply plants and look after planters at the Roddens site, dismantle old Zimmer frames and other equipment beyond useful service for recycling, make walking sticks out of old bent Zimmer frames and recently supported the Community Dentists by preparing to send out toothpaste, brushes, information leaflets in padded envelopes to children aged 3-8 years. The Dental Service notes 40% reduction of cavities presenting to them recently.

## **THE HEALTH CENTRE**

**DRS FANNIN, HUTCHINSON, BOYD PRACTICE** – Dr Fannin reports: “Our Practice now has 4 GPs and welcomed newly arrived salaried partner Dr Jill Overend. Our Multi-Disciplinary Team includes Practice Nurses Una McCollum and Christine Pyper, Mental Health Practitioner Joanne Hamilton, Pharmacist Hannah Forbes, Physiotherapist Dawn Aitken and awaits addition of 2 Social Workers to complete the Team. Practice Manager Debbie Michael and her Reception team, including new addition Molly McLaughlin, have been very busy implementing Covid measures, organising flu vaccinations, Covid vaccinations in the Joey Dunlop Centre, dealing with staff absences and changing care delivery by telephone, Zoom or face to face essential appointments.

Our Team required urgent training for Covid related topics such as correct use of PPE, recognition of deteriorating Covid condition, palliative care for Covid patients and rolling out a Covid Vaccination Programme.”

**THE FAMILY PRACTICE** – Dr David Johnston reported: “I am extremely proud of how our entire Practice Team met the challenges posed by the Covid Pandemic. We remained open every weekday, implemented Covid precautions fully to protect our staff and vulnerable patients. All patient contacts were triaged by phone and appropriate advice, referrals or face to face consultations arranged. GPs worked from home if required to self-isolate.

The 2 Ballymoney Practices now care for 18,225 patients. Our Family Practice now has 9 full or part time GPs, 2 Practice Nurses, 13 Reception Staff led by our busy and efficient Practice Manager Nuala Lamont.

Our Multi-Disciplinary Team now includes 2 Pharmacists Janet Magee and Karina Duffy, 2 Physiotherapists Adam Wilson and Claire Doherty, 2 Mental Health Practitioners Louise McKechnie and Joanne Hamilton and 2 Social Workers Sarah Jane O’Donnell and Una Forsythe, all of whom have been an invaluable asset.

Additional Covid Care demands included:

- 1) GPs staffing the local Covid Centre in Coleraine which clinically assessed and treated patients with Covid symptoms or diagnosis away from our Health Centres;
- 2) Providing GP care for Robinson Hospital in-patients;
- 3) Our Social Workers contacted all vulnerable and elderly patients to offer support or referral for services if required;
- 4) We are most proud of setting up and rolling out the Covid Vaccination Programme in the Joey Dunlop Centre. Along with 3 other practices, 30,000 patients were vaccinated, sometimes 1,000 per day. Vaccinators included our GPs, Nurses, Multi-Disciplinary Team and volunteers including our retired GP Dr Rory McCartney.”

The Treatment Room remains very busy and has implemented an appointment system. Community Dentistry, Health Visiting, Community Midwives, Speech and Language Therapy and Dietetics all continue to provide valuable services from the Health Centre.

**PODIATRY SERVICES** – David Magill, Deputy Podiatry Manager reports: “Our caseload was risk stratified. Active wound patients were given appointments, redress packs were delivered to isolating clients at home. Moderate to high risk patients were triaged by phone, photo or Zoom calls. Throughout this time we were still able to maintain the regional diabetic foot pathway and continued to have virtual advice from or referrals to Causeway, Antrim and the Royal Victoria Hospital for urgent and complex cases. Due to staff reductions throughout the Northern Trust we were required to redeploy staff to other centres”

**ADULT MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCE CENTRE** – Elaine Twaddle, Centre Manager reported: “The Centre remained open throughout lockdown and offered safe urgent face to face consultations as required. She noted a marked increase in patient referrals due to pandemic and lockdown related to job losses, relationship breakdowns, increased domestic violence and increased alcohol and substance dependence.” Dr David Johnston reports that the inclusion of Mental Health Practitioners in GP Practice Teams, supported by the GP Federation, had reduced referrals to Mental Health services by about 40% in Ballymoney area.

**CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE (CAMHS)**- This service has continued to be very busy in 2020 with workload increased by Covid lockdown effects on families and home schooling. Dr Johnston notes that there has been an explosion of both children and adults presenting with anxiety disorders during and since the Pandemic.

**PROJECTS** – Towards the end of 2020, the NHSCT in partnership with the Robinson Hospital Trust Board prepared a Business Model and application for a major refurbishment of the Robinson Hospital. Accumulated funds from Robinson Trust investments were to cover the capital costs of about £2.2 million. This would involve refurbishing the existing ward wing to create 16 beds with ensuite access, and also improve staff, visitor and day care amenities. To date we are very happy to report that in May 2021 the NHSCT agreed to progress this project and we await further developments since public consultation period has recently ended.

Car Parking extension project for the Robinson site was continuing to progress.

**PERSONNEL** – We welcomed the appointment of Jennifer Welsh as new Chief Executive for the NHSCT in July 2020. She and her Trust Board Directors have continued to work closely with our Trust Board.

I have attempted to summarise the reports provided to me. You will be left in no doubt about the determined and highly professional care delivered by all staff on the Robinson Hospital site during a most challenging year. We give our heartfelt thanks to them all for their compassion, stamina and above all safe care.

I wish to thank all those who supplied reports to me from the various Robinson departments. In particular, I thank Rosemary Lyttle, our hard working and efficient Secretary for her support and guidance, Joan Carey, our Assistant Honorary Secretary and Vice President Margaret Allison for their advice in completing this report.

Lastly, but not insignificantly, I wish to record our delight at the award of Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) by Her Majesty the Queen to David John Marshall Robinson in her New Year’s Honours. David has worked tirelessly to improve health care delivery in our area,

has led the Robinson Board of Trustees with outstanding energy and wisdom in their investment and project strategies and has still found time in his capacity as Funeral Director to offer comfort and support to many families who have lost loved ones particularly during this Pandemic year. Congratulations, David Robinson MBE.

Dr John G Flynn

Honorary Secretary, Robinson Memorial Hospital Board of Trustees .

13 October 2021