

Guildford and South Surrey Branch, Parkinson's UK

AGM – 23 February 2021

Chair's Report.

Summary

It need hardly be said that 2020 was a very strange year indeed for everyone, not just for members of this Branch. The development from January onwards of the global COVID pandemic resulted in a range of restrictive measures on the whole population, from lockdowns to lighter controls, throughout the year. Normal social and other activities had to be suspended for much of the time. But despite that, and with a lot of help from our friends, the Branch continued to offer many services, and enabled members to take part in a range of activities. These have been almost entirely on-line, with members and providers proving themselves adept at mastering new technical skills and showing great determination to adapt to the prevailing circumstances. My thanks go to *everyone* for not allowing the Branch to hibernate!

Membership and finances.

Our membership remains steady at around 360. Finances are healthy and will be reported on in more detail by our Treasurer.

Members' meetings and social activities.

These were put on hold during the Spring and early Summer, but by August the Branch had resumed its monthly members' meetings – on Zoom! We had all learned how to use this by then! Tea and cakes had to be provided on a self-service basis, but, that aside, the usual format of tea, chat and – usually – a speaker, proved to work well. Although many of us missed seeing each other in person, a number of attendees welcomed being able to join from the comfort of their own armchairs. The Working Age Group also met regularly on Zoom and enjoyed many quizzes and other activities to keep in touch with each other while their regular venue, The Withies, remained closed. Sadly, nothing could replace our bigger social activities – the summer cream tea, Autumn bowling on the Green, the Christmas lunch – but we are all hoping that 2021 will enable us to make up for lost time. The highlight of the year was probably our Christmas meeting on 9 December, when Emily Bollon of Motivation by Music gave us a preview of the Virtual Christmas Concert which she had put together with the Parkinsong Voices (of which more later.)

Exercise classes.

These continued either by Zoom or by video link throughout the year. Huge thanks go to our energetic and inventive providers – Kim Wilson of Surrey Hills Rehab, Adam Poulter of Foundations Physio, and Sue Buckland of Pilates Perfection – for rising to the challenge. Not only did they keep the classes going on-line, but found other ways of delivering the help and support which class participants and their

partners needed. Many members have said that, without this, their physical and mental health would have taken a far greater hit during this stressful period.

Parkinson Voices

This also moved quickly to meeting virtually each week and, as mentioned above, came to a crescendo in December when our choir joined forces with other singing groups run by Emily to produce the Virtual Christmas Concert, broadcast live on YouTube on 13 December. A joyous occasion, and a very profitable one for the Branch, as our Treasurer will report. Once again, although many members of the Voices missed meeting and singing together in person, the advantages of performing virtually were that there were no restrictions on numbers and no transport or mobility issues to be overcome.

Respite care and Care for Carers.

Crossroads Care continued to offer their respite care services during the year, for which we were grateful. In addition, we decided that, given that other activities had transferred successfully to Zoom, we should set up a virtual Carers' Group. (The Carers' Lunches, which took place until a couple of years ago, had folded because so many carers were finding it hard to attend.) The monthly Zoom calls have proved a great success, putting carers in touch with each other to exchange notes and tips, and provide a bit of much-needed support during a particularly difficult time. This group will continue with further groups being set up if the first one grows too large.

Communications.

The Park was published and distributed three times as usual during the year. Many thanks go to Anne Folkes for her hard work in maintaining such a high standard of well-written and interesting newsletters, produced in rather more difficult circumstances than previous years. And we are most grateful to Arbreen of Oakleaf Enterprise for going more than the extra mile to produce and distribute the hard copies.

Conscious that members were more dependent than pre-COVID on electronic communications, we have made an effort to keep our website up-to-date and also to send occasional emails to all members, to draw particular things to your attention. We have now begun to send regular monthly updates, highlighting forthcoming activities. My thanks to John Oldham, our Membership Secretary, for accepting an increase in his workload to help the committee keep in touch with you all.

Work of the committee

The committee has continued to meet every six weeks or so and my thanks go to all of them for the part that each one of them has played in keeping the Branch going. We have not yet replaced those who left us last year and would welcome new committee members – the more there are of us, the easier it becomes for each and the more we are able to keep in tune with what you expect and need from us. I am grateful to those who have volunteered to help with running future social meetings and would encourage *anyone* who has a little time to offer and has some ideas about what the Branch should be doing, to step forward for the committee.

Future Plans

We plan to maintain our programme of activities for the rest of this year. As restrictions start to ease (we hope!), there will be scope to move gradually back to in-person meetings and activities, probably starting with some of the exercise classes. But we also recognise the value to a number of our members of retaining some on-line provision, and so a “mixed economy” might be the way forward in some areas. We would like to add Speech and Language Therapy to the current programme and are exploring ways to provide this, and the costs involved.

As promised in my report last year, we have set aside more money this year for respite care, with a one-off offer to fund a more substantial period of respite for a small number of members. We hope that this will enable some carers to take a longer break in 2021 than might otherwise have been possible.

We are also conscious that we do not have anything specifically for those who have been fairly recently diagnosed with Parkinson’s and who might wish for support and information in those early stages. A new monthly drop-in group (on Zoom of course!) is about to start with those in mind.

Finally, as has been flagged many times already, this is the last year when the Branch will benefit from the very generous legacy which has funded so many of our activities in the past few years. Our Treasurer, Steve Heron, will say more about this in his report. We will almost certainly need to increase the contributions from those who take part in classes, and, in addition, fundraising will be an important issue from now on. Recent newsletters have asked for someone to volunteer to work with Steve to coordinate our fundraising efforts. While we wait for someone to come forward, Valerie Box has kindly offered to fill the gap on an interim basis. But anyone can run their own individual fundraising event – great or small – which might add a few pounds to our coffers. There are a few ideas already on our website so put your thinking caps on!

Niki Tompkinson

Chair, Guildford and South Surrey Branch, Parkinson’s UK

10 February 2021