

NEURO MATTERS

AUTUMN 2021



The Walton Centre
NHS Foundation Trust

Excellence in Neuroscience




Stronger together -
**WARD LIFE AT THE
WALTON CENTRE**

Brain waves

Making a diagnosis
and making a
difference

Care closer to home

New spinal clinics
for north Wales



“I’m privileged to be able to use my skills as a neurosurgeon to improve our patients’ quality of life.”

Mr David Carter, Consultant
Neurosurgeon, The Walton Centre.

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Welcome to the autumn 2021 issue of Neuromatters, the magazine of The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust. Regular readers will notice we've given our magazine a facelift, bringing you even more news and features about The Walton Centre and The Walton Centre Charity.

In this issue we look at the amazing work done by our Neurophysiology Team. This multi-disciplinary group diagnose disorders of the nervous system and see approximately 5000 patients a year. As well as providing the very latest diagnosis techniques, they also place a keen focus on training and development, to ensure we, and other centres across the country, can see as many patients as possible.

We hear from Jenni Atkinson, Ward Manager on Chavasse Ward, about the amazing treatment and care given on the ward, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the staff and patients.

There's also the latest news from around the Trust and Charity including a new spinal service across north Wales, and some of our fantastic fundraisers. I hope you enjoy this issue.

Jan Ross

Chief Executive

The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust

'LIFE-SIZE' VIDEO CALLS ENHANCE PATIENT EXPERIENCE



Peter, a patient in the Complex Rehabilitation Unit, using one of the new screens in an occupational therapy session

Three innovative new activity screens have been implemented in key areas by the Patient & Family Experience Team (PFET), thanks to funding from NHS England and NHS Improvement through the NHS Volunteers COVID-19 Fund.

The screens called Activi Touch tables, provided by Lifesize Touch, are 32" and 43" high definition touchscreens that allow patients to take part in a range of activities, including video calling friends and relatives - seeing them life-size onscreen.

Each one is mobile, with a battery pack, and can be elevated to the height of a patient's bedside to enable them to talk to loved ones. This was particularly important with the visiting restrictions imposed earlier

in the year during the second and third waves of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lisa Gurrell, Head of PFET, said: "I'm thrilled that we were able to secure funding for these activity screens! It's been difficult for inpatients and their loved ones who couldn't visit during the pandemic. We've had video calling available to patients throughout, but with this funding we knew we could enhance that further. An unexpected positive has also been that our therapy colleagues have been able to use them for rehabilitation. They can use apps and games on the screens that can improve hand-eye coordination and other motor skills for brain injured patients - they're a real hit and really enhance the experience of our patients!"

Jan Ross appointed as new CEO



Jan Ross, former Director of Operations and Strategy and Deputy Chief Executive at The Walton Centre, has been appointed as the Trust's new Chief Executive. Jan, who has 30 years' experience working in the NHS, joined The Walton Centre in November 2018. A nurse by background, she has also spent time at Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust, Warrington and Halton Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust.

She said: "I am delighted to be taking on the leadership of The Walton Centre, already an outstanding trust with a long history of providing highly specialised care. I want to take this further – we should capitalise on our great potential, and strive to be the very best. The Walton Centre should be synonymous with fantastic clinical standards, new and exciting research that drives forward healthcare, and a culture that facilitates the professional development and wellbeing of our staff. I know our staff want this as much as I do, and I am really excited to work together to achieve it."

Janet Rosser, Trust Chair said: "The Walton Centre staff will know what an immense impact Jan has had on our organisation since she started at the Trust, and the great leadership she has provided throughout the coronavirus pandemic. I am confident she will continue to lead our hospital with passion and dedication for the benefit of all our patients and their families, and our staff."

Professor Tom Solomon has been awarded a CBE in the Queen's birthday honours list, in recognition of his services to neurological and emerging infections research, including during the COVID-19 response. He is internationally renowned for his expertise in encephalitis (inflammation and swelling of the brain), he said: "I am truly honoured by this award, which reflects the tremendous support I have had from family and friends, plus the enormous efforts of a very large group of colleagues over many years."

The trust has been accredited with the Investors in People (IIP) Health and Wellbeing Gold standard, which is added to an earlier Gold accreditation in the IIP Employer standard awarded October 2020. Both reflect the culture our staff have built here at The Walton Centre and the dedication to providing the right environment for our staff to provide outstanding care to our patients. The trust was also noted for its strong core values and fully inclusive approach to wellbeing initiatives.

The Walton Centre was one of the top 20 centres for organ donation last year. 17 patients who passed away at the hospital became organ donors, contributing to the national effort to save or improve the lives of 3,391 people desperately in need of a transplant in the UK. The report from NHS Blood and Transplant reveals a steady increase in support for organ donation around the country, with 69% of families giving their consent when asked about organ donation.

AWARD-WINNING RHS GARDEN DONATED TO STAFF



Staff at The Walton Centre will be able to enjoy a brand new garden in the grounds of the hospital following a display at RHS Flower Show Tatton Park. The 'Breathe Easy' garden was designed by Peter Lloyd from Liverpool and won the Silver-gilt medal at the show in July.

The focus of the garden is mindfulness and the design aims to offer sanctuary and tranquillity in which to meditate and retreat from the pressures of everyday life. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the importance of

quality outdoor spaces which are essential to people's physical and mental wellbeing.

The garden consists of two beds lined with ornamental grasses, herbs and plants, with each bed separated by a footpath made up of environmentally friendly gravel. Seating and rest points provide a pleasant spot to practice mindfulness, feel immersed in the garden and gain a sense of wellbeing.

Jan Ross, CEO at The Walton Centre, said: "Thank you to

Gardens by Peter Lloyd and Jonathan Myers of Mustard Seed Garden for their generous support and enabling this garden to be moved to our hospital site for staff to enjoy and relax in following its display at RHS Flower Show Tatton Park.

"The past year has been incredibly difficult for everyone, particularly those involved in healthcare, and to be able to have a beautiful space such as the 'Breathe Easy' garden available to staff will really support their mental wellbeing, for the benefit of themselves and our patients."

GOVERNOR UPDATE

Melanie Worthington, 50, has been a Partnership Governor at The Walton Centre since late 2020. As co-chair of the Cheshire and Merseyside Neurological Alliance, the role helps develop the understanding of the Trust and how the Alliance can support that work.

She said: "Governors have a crucial role, holding the Board to account, while also recognising the great work done at the Trust. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way healthcare was delivered practically overnight. In the face of adversity, staff at The Walton Centre took up the extremely difficult challenge and demonstrated speed, flexibility and not least, stamina which should be applauded.

"In the future I see great promise for increased collaborative working with patients and carers built around engagement and consultation in any new developments. I look forward to this in my role as a Partnership Governor to continue to support The Walton Centre in this area."

WALTON SURGEON LAUNCHES SATELLITE SPINAL CLINICS



Mr Rath preparing equipment for spinal surgery

The Trust is working alongside the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopedic Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (RJAH) to bring care for spinal patients in North Wales closer to home.

There are new spinal clinics facilitated by Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, which are being piloted by the two specialist trusts.

Consultant Spinal Surgeon Mr Narendra Kumar Rath, who is running the clinics, said: "As a part of our Care Close to Home Initiative bringing clinics to some of the more remote regions the hospital serves, means less travel and more meeting clinicians, which is often a stressful occurrence, in a familiar setting. Having held clinics already, I can say with some confidence that both patients and clinicians are responding positively to having us closer to home."

42-year-old Dominic Roberts from Rhuddlan near Rhyl injured his spine in 2008. After searching for a solution privately and through the NHS, Dominic was referred to The Walton Centre, shortly after Mr Rath's new spinal clinic was introduced.

He said: "My travel time to the hospital has been reduced from over an hour to 15 minutes. It means less pressure to get there and less anxiety about traffic. My injury means I'm in constant pain; so long journeys in the car can be very uncomfortable. Having the new spinal clinics in North Wales means we've got some of the best surgeons and clinicians in the country closer to home, which can only improve the quality of support for patients like me."

Did you know..?

The Walton Centre is involved in leading clinical trials to improve the treatment and care for neurological and neurosurgical patients.

14,000+

patients have been recruited to research studies over the past 10 years.

3rd

We were the third trust in the UK to recruit a patient to a headache trial, that is looking at the effectiveness and safety of Erenumab for patients who are suffering with chronic migraines and medication overuse



The Trust sponsors TONIC, a national study examining the factors that influence quality of life in patients with neurological conditions. It is one of the largest studies on quality of life in neurological conditions ever performed in the UK.

Find out more about research opportunities on our website:
thewaltoncentre.nhs.uk
or by emailing: RDI@thewaltoncentre.nhs.uk

SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE

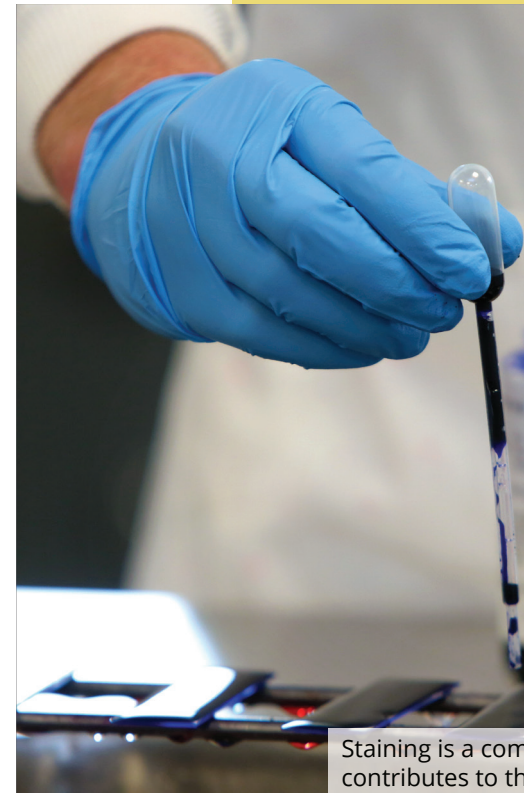
A muscle biopsy is a regular test conducted at The Walton Centre. It is a small day case procedure which involves removing tissue from muscle, usually the thigh or leg and rarely other muscles depending on the symptoms. The sample is frozen to -160°C , thinly sliced and then 'stained' in our laboratory. This is then tested in numerous ways and reviewed by the neuropathologist to see what is going on at a microscopic level.

Once the samples have been stained and reviewed, a multidisciplinary team meeting, involving neurologists and neuropathologists, is held every fortnight to determine how best to proceed with diagnosis and treatment.

Chief Biomedical Scientist Amanda Williams said: "It's an incredibly important set of tests that our laboratory team performs on muscle biopsies. It requires time and a thorough analysis of the sample to ensure a proper diagnosis can be reached. The Walton Centre is a regional centre for this type of testing – hospitals from across Cheshire, Merseyside and North Wales send muscle biopsies to us for analysis. For one muscle biopsy, we perform multiple procedures and stains looking at a range of things from enzyme activities, chemical changes, pattern of muscle fibres and the ultrastructure of the sample. Producing a diagnosis from a muscle biopsy is a lengthy process because of the highly skilled scientific work performed in the laboratory coupled with the expert interpretation of our Consultant Neuropathologist."

Each year, the laboratory can process up to 70 muscle biopsies, which can lead to treatment and diagnosis for each patient. The centre also trains staff from across the NHS in the processing of muscle biopsies in a neurological setting.


Neuropathologist Dr Nitika Rathi said: "As part of the investigations for neuromuscular disorders, a muscle biopsy examination can provide vital information. Various in-house laboratory tests help us to examine the muscle tissue for a range of muscle disorders including inflammatory, metabolic, muscular dystrophy etc. The findings may be diagnostic or, in unusual cases, may provide the clinicians with valuable information to guide further investigations."




Staining is a com
contributes to th



Chief Biom
Williams pr



Complex process, which
ensures the accuracy of diagnosis.



Medical Scientist Amanda
is processing a sample.



Samples are stained to highlight different things, from chemical activity to cell structure.

ON THE SAME WAVELENGTH



Bryn, from north Wales, having electrodes attached to his head to monitor electrical activity.

“Without the service here at The Walton Centre, I wouldn’t have been able to have a career in teaching”
Carol Hulse, patient

Neurophysiology is a branch of physiology and neuroscience that focuses on the function of the nervous system. At The Walton Centre we have a dedicated diagnostic service that undertakes a range of specialised investigations, involving the brain and spinal cord to peripheral nerves and muscles.

The 24-strong team of Consultant Neurophysiologists, Clinical Physiologists, Healthcare Assistants and admin team, see approximately 5,000 patients a year, helping to diagnose disorders of the nervous system such as epilepsy, neuromuscular diseases and nerve entrapments.

“Neurophysiology services can sound really intimidating to patients, but really it’s looking at what is

happening to the activity of the brain and nervous system, which can lead to a diagnosis, and the potential of treatment. Tests can last up to an hour in the department, a week at home or up to two weeks on the ward, so it’s critical that no aspect of quality is compromised,” said Service Manager Caroline Finnegan.

Due to the extended time patients can be monitored, feedback on the experience is key to Caroline and her team. She said: “Patients have to be at the heart of what we do. We ask everyone to feed back about their experiences. We get some amazing comments about the support that the team provides. We display the messages in the waiting room for other patients to see, and share them with the team and wider division.”

To enhance the service further the department recently invested in a mobile telemetry cart, which means there is flexibility in being able to conduct investigations in various ward side rooms at an inpatient’s bedside. Caroline said: “Before this recent innovation, patients would need to be moved to dedicated side rooms set up specifically for neurophysiology. Now we have a system which is housed on a fully integrated trolley. This has allowed us to respond flexibly in light of changes to bed capacity and still maintain access to the telemetry service.”



Neurophysiologists reviewing patient test results.

Carol praises team for enhanced support

When Carol Hulse first encountered neurophysiology, it was a relatively new service. 53 years ago, at the age of 11, Carol was diagnosed with Myasthenia Gravis, a rare long-term condition that causes muscle weakness.

“Family and friends began to notice I had a lazy eye and I couldn’t smile properly. Soon after I had problems lifting my head and limbs, and swallowing and chewing became difficult,” Carol said. “After the diagnosis I underwent several tests at Alder Hey Children’s Hospital, fortunately I’ve been looked after by The Walton Centre very effectively since that time.”

The 64-year-old teacher has been managing her condition with medication, until recently. She said: “I stopped taking my medication before the test and wanted to make sure I wasn’t going to relapse. My neurologist sent me to neurophysiology, where

I discovered that my condition seemed to have gone. The testing reassured me and after consulting my neurologist, I’m now drug free thanks to the Neurophysiology Department’s accuracy.

“I do not like a hospital environment, but the team at The Walton Centre is excellent. I felt calm and comfortable, even though the test involved wires to monitor the electrical impulses. The specialist consultant explained what the readings meant, it was fascinating and put me at ease. I’m very grateful that the department exists with this sort of specialist technology, so they can support people with conditions like mine.

“The Walton Centre has been an important part of my life because of my career as a teacher. Through lockdown I’ve been supporting students with special needs through exams, so being able to function normally with my condition has been crucial. Without the hospital and the wider NHS, I would’ve struggled to have had a career at all.”

Training the next generation

17

Since 2016 we have supported the clinical placements for 17 students on the undergraduate programme.



The apprentice experiences a realistic view of the ‘world of work’ as they are work based for longer periods of time rather than dipping into it via more brief periods of clinical placement. Their academic training is delivered in collaboration with Manchester Metropolitan University.



From the current clinical physiologist staff group, over 50% were trained at The Walton Centre and were recruited into the team when they qualified.

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL



“Knowing you’re on a trial specifically looking at your condition gives you such hope that it could make a real difference, not just to me but to others in my situation.”

Heather, patient

and with medication overuse headaches. Erenumab is a drug specifically developed for use in migraine treatment.

“It’s been a long slog since I started experiencing migraines in my teens, but after trying different treatments it finally feels like there is light at the end of the tunnel with this trial,” said Heather.

“Knowing you’re on a trial specifically looking at your condition gives you such hope that it could make a real difference, not just to me but to others in my situation.

“When I met Dr Nick Silver in 2019 at The Walton Centre, I was at the end of my tether but the support and guidance he and the team at the Neuroscience Research Centre have given me has been a lifeline. I can’t speak highly enough of the team and the work they do. They see you not just as a patient, but as a person and are just lovely – I actually look forward to coming here every month for my injections!”

For many, headaches and migraines are an annoyance but for others they represent crippling pain and life-changing effects. Heather Dixon, 57, from Southport is one of those whose life has been significantly impacted by migraines. A patient at The Walton Centre since 2017 she has been suffering from migraines and headaches for over 40 years.

“I first experienced what I now know to be a migraine when I was about 15 with a visual disturbance,” said Heather. “Through my 20s and 30s I had regular severe headaches – they not only affected my day-to-day life, but weekends and holidays. Six years ago, when I was running an event for work, I was sick 14 times overnight. I read a magazine article about migraines and it suddenly clicked.”

Heather tried countless treatments, including different medications and reducing her intake of different food and drinks. “What I found interesting was that all of the drugs I was prescribed were originally developed for another condition – there was nothing developed specifically for migraines. However, they all gave me significant side-effects, including tiredness. I was looking after my husband at the time, who had been treated for encephalitis twice, and had uncontrolled epilepsy, so I couldn’t be debilitated through medication side-effects.”

In early 2021 Heather became the first patient in the north west and only the third in the country to be recruited onto a trial looking at the effectiveness and safety of Erenumab with patients who are suffering with chronic migraines,

Q&A

JENNI ATKINSON, WARD MANAGER



Jenni Atkinson has been a nurse for 19 years, joining The Walton Centre as a Staff Nurse in 2002. As Ward Manager on Chavasse Ward since January 2021, she talks about the positivity which has shone through despite the challenges of the past 18 months.

What treatment and care is delivered on Chavasse Ward?

We care for patients with long-term neurological conditions, for example epilepsy and multiple sclerosis. We also have some surgical patients and a number of beds reserved for suspected or positive COVID patients. We carry out telemetry,

where patients are monitored 24 hours a day through electrodes applied to the head to investigate seizures via an EEG.

How would you describe the vibe on Chavasse Ward?

Busy! But the team is incredibly friendly and close-knit; everyone is eager and passionate about the treatment and care they deliver for our patients and their families. We have some very complex patients, some of whom require constant one-to-one care. It can be challenging but it's such a great team here – everyone supports each other.

Challenging is a word often used to describe the past 18 months. Chavasse Ward was the dedicated COVID ward at The Walton Centre, what impact did that have?

It has been incredibly challenging, and also very upsetting – on a professional, and personal level. Losing so many patients and coping with staff absences and all the constant changes was so difficult. However, the team has been incredibly strong throughout. When we asked people if they wanted to move, they all wanted to stay on the ward and stay together – that's what has got them through; being stronger together.

What does the future hold for Chavasse Ward?

For the foreseeable we will continue to take suspected or confirmed COVID patients in our red isolation areas. But we're also continuing to move back towards 'normal'; increasing treatments and services like telemetry, plasma exchange and deep brain stimulation for patients who have had these on hold due to the pandemic. It's been very upsetting – for patients and our teams - to have to delay services like this but we're really positive about the increase in patients now being able to access the treatment they need. Hopefully, it's a brighter future!

GOING OFF PISTE WITH HOPE MOUNTAIN HIKE



Supporters of The Walton Centre raised over £5,500 through their own bespoke Hope Mountain Hikes this year, following the cancellation of the annual event.

One of our youngest fundraisers, Archie Brady, 5, topped the £1,300 mark. His parents' employer, Innospec Cares, then gave an incredible £2,500 for his efforts.

In May, Archie ran, walked and cycled 12½ miles over four days to thank The Walton Centre for saving his nanny's life not once, but twice.

Fifteen years ago, Karen Carr suffered a brain haemorrhage and was successfully treated at The Walton Centre. Then, seven years later, during a routine scan, a brain aneurysm was found which was again, successfully treated by the staff at The Walton Centre. Karen's daughter, and Archie's

mum, Sam, said his efforts were to give something back to the hospital and thank all the staff for their brilliant work.

"All the family are so grateful for what The Walton Centre did, we just can't speak highly enough of the quality of the treatment and care the staff gave to my mum and all the family."

Two sisters, Julia Vernon and Rachel Rochford, cycled and walked 300 miles between them for their virtual Hope Mountain Hike, raising over £1,000 in memory of their dad, David, who passed away at The Walton Centre in 2016 after suffering a brain haemorrhage.

"We both used the Home from Home accommodation when Dad was in the critical care unit in the weeks before his death," said Julia. "Being so near to him meant

everything to us. It meant we could get some rest knowing if things changed we were only across a car park rather than half an hour's drive away."

Madeleine Fletcher, Head of Fundraising at The Walton Centre Charity said it had been a difficult 12 months for charities, but supporters like Archie, Julia and Rachel had been amazing at creating their own way to fundraise. "We can't thank our supporters enough for their efforts over the past year – it's been amazing, and the money they've raised will benefit so many patients and their families, now and in the future."

If you want to sign up for Hope Mountain Hike 2022, contact: hello@thewaltoncentrecharity.org

TEAM WALTON TACKLE VIRTUAL MARATHON



A team from The Walton Centre will be taking part in the Virtual London Marathon this year, on a specially created 26.2 mile course around Liverpool. With the full event unable to take place due to COVID-19 restrictions, runners will be taking on their own routes on Sunday 3 October wherever they are in the world.

The Walton Centre Charity team includes a mixture of staff, patients and supporters. Chief Executive Jan Ross is one of those taking part. "It's my first marathon, and I'm not sure what I've got myself into but it's to raise money for a great cause and I look forward to joining our other runners for what promises to be an 'interesting' day!"

Look out for more information on our team, the route they'll be taking and how you can support them on our social media channels.

DOCTOR'S MESS TRANSFORMED



Artist's impression

Junior doctors at The Walton Centre will be able to enjoy a refurbished and modernised mess thanks to funding from the BMA Fatigue and Facilities Charter and a grant from NHS Charities Together.

The improved facilities will include rooms for staff to rest when on call, a kitchenette and an area for communal relaxation.

Mr Matthew Stovell, specialist registrar at The Walton Centre, said: "This refurbishment will improve morale by providing junior doctors a place to take breaks in a comfortable space. It will encourage collaboration in the Trust as doctors from different teams interact together."

"The working environment of junior doctors will be improved immensely, and we hope mitigate against 'junior doctor burnout' reduced in these demanding medical specialties."

"Thank you to the support of The Walton Centre Charity and NHS Charities Together who have funded this work through a significant grant; their generosity and those who made donations across the country will make a huge difference."

How to support The Walton Centre Charity

Sign up to our lottery

For just £1 per week you can sign up to play The Walton Centre lottery, run in conjunction with Everton in the Community. Every time you play 60% of your stake goes directly to The Walton Centre. Sign up now at thewaltoncentrecharity.org

Fundraise for us

We have a range of ideas on our website, and tips on how to make the most of your fundraising activity. You can set up a fundraising page on our website and invite your friends and family to get involved and support you.

Make a donation

You can either make a one-off or regular donation to The Walton Centre Charity via our website. Your donation – however big or small – will make a real difference to patients treated at The Walton Centre now and in the future.

CHARITY CHRISTMAS CARDS



The Walton Centre Charity Christmas cards are on sale from September at the Fundraising Office in main reception of The Walton Centre. There are many designs to choose from and cards are sold in packs of 10 at £3.50 per pack.

They are also available to buy online at thewaltoncentrecharity.org

Fundraising Team

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