

Neuromatters

Spring/Summer 2024



Life-saving care
Our pioneering
thrombectomy team

Hidden heroes
The staff having a huge
impact behind the scenes

A decade of support
A specialist clinic
for patients with
claustrophobia

The Walton Centre is the UK's only specialist hospital Trust for neurology and neurosurgery. We're leading the way by delivering meaningful patient outcomes, developing groundbreaking innovations and providing exceptional teaching across neurology, neurosurgery, spinal, pain management and rehabilitation services.

Everybody at The Walton Centre is unified by the same mission: to deliver lifechanging treatment and care that is transformative for people in the community.

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Neuromatters is written and designed by the Communications and Marketing Team at The Walton Centre, and printed by Zenith Print Group.

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'The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust and Charity'.



Welcome to the latest issue of Neuromatters, the magazine of The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust. In this issue, we take a look at the work of our thrombectomy team who perform life-saving and life-changing procedures on stroke patients.

We're also celebrating the incredible long service of our staff at The Walton Centre. At an event earlier this year, we marked 10, 20 and 30 years of service at the hospital by staff from across all teams and departments. It was a really lovely occasion.

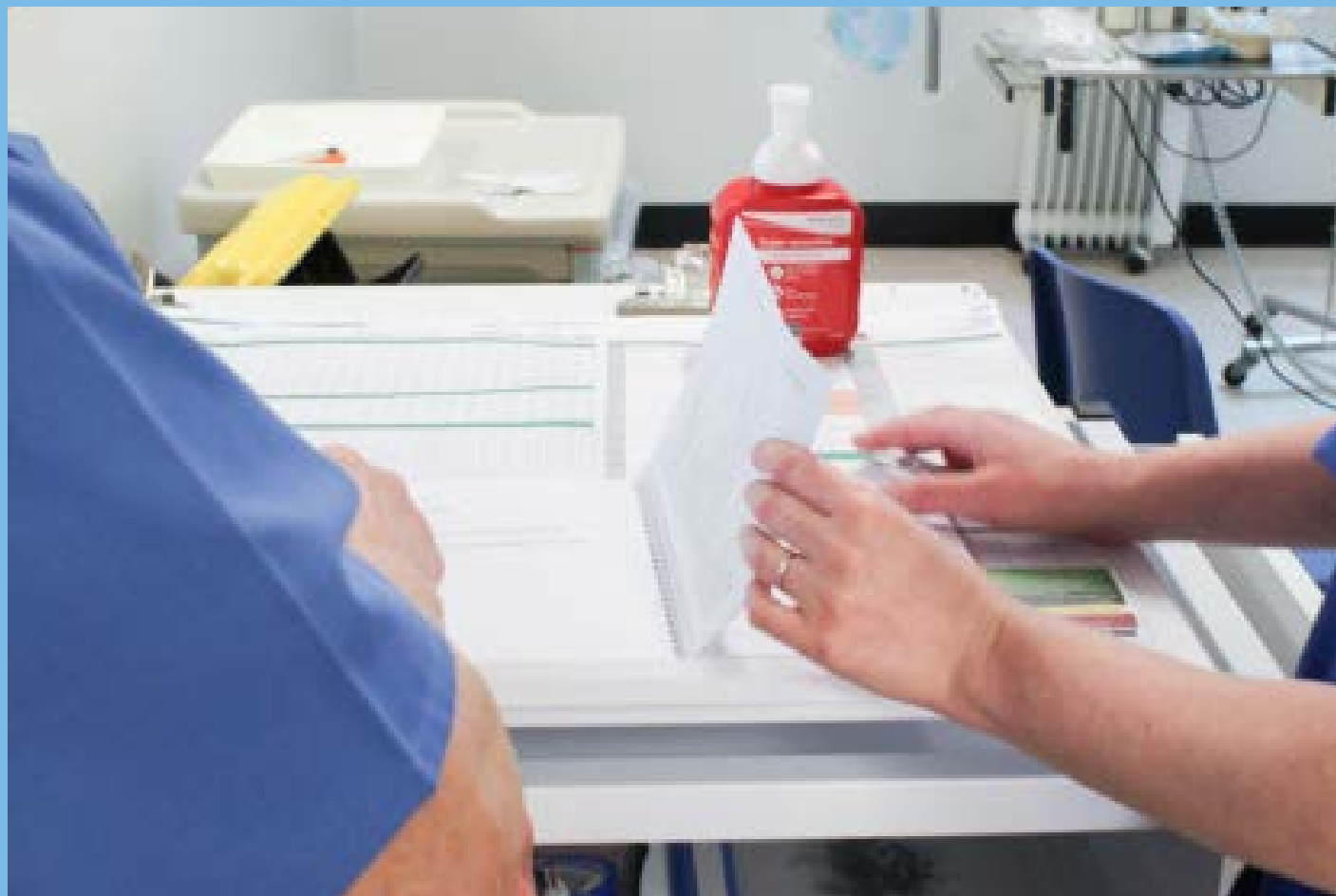
Also in this issue, we wanted to show you some of the vital work that goes on 'behind the scenes'. There are many different roles and responsibilities in the hospital that contribute in different ways to patient care.

The hospital has some fantastic fundraisers too! Take a look through our charity stories and fundraising opportunities, which all contribute towards enhancing the patient experience at The Walton Centre.

I hope you enjoy this issue.

Jan Ross
Chief Executive
The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust

Supporting critically ill patients



Having a loved one in the Horsley Intensive Care Unit at The Walton Centre can be a very emotional and worrying time.

With 20 beds, the unit is full of complex, life-saving machines and critically ill patients. For both patients and family members it can be a frightening and confusing experience, so staff have created a new ICU patient diary, to explain what goes on in the unit and chart a patient's progress.

Oonagh Doherty, ICU Matron, said: "Patients and family members have found it very useful to look back at notes and diaries they have made during the time they've been a patient in ICU.

"Patients may be in a coma or sedated, or on medication and can't remember things, which can

be very scary. It's also good for family members; there's a lot going on and it's comforting to be able to look back and review progress."

The diary also explains the different equipment in ICU, medical terms which might be heard, and has space for family members to complete information about their loved one. This allows staff to get to know them better to enable us to treat them better and with the respect and dignity they deserve.

"With 20 beds, the unit is full of complex, life-saving machines and critically ill patients. For both patients and family members it can be a frightening and confusing experience"

Claustrophobia clinic celebrates 10 years



The Walton Centre's Radiology Department has celebrated an incredible ten years of providing a specialist MRI clinic for patients with claustrophobia.

The clinic was first supported by the Roy Ferguson Fund, set up by The Walton Centre Charity.

The service, which has seen over 830 patients over the last decade, provides a slower process and other support to enable patients to get the scans they need.

The clinic works at a slower pace and provides patients with support strategies, which enable them to complete their scans. As a consequence, the numbers of patients requiring general anaesthesia for scanning claustrophobic patients has reduced significantly.

Lisa Weights, Lead Radiographer, said: "The clinic provides a unique service, empowering patients to complete their scans and ensuring neurosurgeons and neurologists have the diagnostic information to determine the best course of action for their patients. I'm so proud of what we achieve as a team, it makes an incredible difference to our patients."

Food quality scores highly

The Walton Centre has scored over 99% for inpatient food in the latest Patient-Led Assessment of the Care Environment (PLACE). After a rigorous assessment completed last year, the national results showed an improvement across all domains, bringing the Trust's results well above the national average.

Sign up to support

Become a member of The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust!

Keep informed on the latest membership events, held by the staff who deliver our outstanding service, and receive an invite to our Annual Members Meeting.

Please visit The Walton Centre's website for more information.

National appointment

Congratulations to Dr Janine Winterbottom, Advanced Nurse Specialist in epilepsy, who has recently been appointed as theme lead for the Reproduction and Hormones programme for the Epilepsy Research Institute UK.

Recognition for long serving staff



We marked over 1200 years of service at our special Long Service event earlier this year, celebrating staff who have reached 10, 20, and 30 years' service at The Walton Centre.

Attendees at the event, which was generously supported by The Walton Centre Charity, received their certificate, commemorative badge and gift voucher from Chief Executive Jan Ross and Chairman Max Steinberg CBE.

Geraldine Mackay, Directorate Lead for Risk and Governance in Radiology who was celebrating 30 years' service, said: "I can't believe it's been 30 years. Some things have changed beyond all recognition, particularly advances in technology, new innovative procedures and the much-increased Trust activity.

"There are many long-serving staff in Radiology and we've all known each other for a long time which is great. There are always new, younger staff, including our international staff, coming in to join the team which is a real bonus. I truly am privileged to have made friendships with so many staff in

various roles throughout the Trust during my time here."

Jan Ross, Chief Executive, said: "It was lovely to be able to celebrate these milestones with our staff, all of whom have made a tremendous commitment to The Walton Centre, their colleagues and our patients and their families.

"They ranged from doctors and nurses to allied health professionals and admin and clerical staff. Across all the professions, they have made a huge difference in their time at the Trust and I thank each and every one."



Podcast gives listeners a behind-the-scenes view



The Walton Centre has launched a new podcast called 'Neuro Stories', highlighting the people behind the neuroscience. With an initial six episode series, staff from across the hospital have got involved in interviews conducted by the hospital's Communications Team.

Head of Communications and Marketing Elaine Vaile said: "We wanted to lift the lid on the services provided by the specialist Trust. It's a close-knit staff group, so being able

to give listeners a rare insight into the people delivering outstanding treatment and care day-to-day was fascinating. So far we've heard from areas such as neurosurgery and neurology to neurophysiology and neuropsychiatry. The podcast will cover a lot more areas of the Trust, so watch this space!"

You can listen to the first few episodes on Spotify or Apple Podcasts, search for 'Neuro Stories' and click subscribe!

Specialist end-of-life care

The Walton Centre has recently rolled out the SWAN model of care for end of life and bereavement.

SWAN (Signs, Words, Action and Needs) is about providing excellent, individualised end of life and bereavement care for every patient and every family, every time. It is patient and family-focused and centres on meeting the unique needs of each individual and their loved ones.

We encourage patients to discuss any specific needs and support they may have with our staff, including chaplaincy support. The staff will do their utmost to support individual needs and promote comfort at end of life and afterwards.

As well as support from specialist staff, the Trust will also be able to provide memory boxes for families to help them through the process.

Emma Wilby, Lead Nurse for Neuro-Oncology and for the SWAN Team, said; "From emotional and psychological guidance to practical advice, the SWAN nurses are there to help at this incredibly difficult time."

Comment, like & share!

"We would like to thank @WaltonCentre and @CCCNHS for being so amazing with us during Kieran's surgeries and treatment. The 2am coffees and toast made a difference and for also letting me and his mum sleepover on Christmas Eve and Day, it's the little things"
Abbie



"I have to say that when my husband was there, he was cared for so so well. After his stay for several weeks he went to CRU where again his care was second to none. Thank you so much!"
Kaley



"Your staff are truly angels, from the cleaners and tea ladies, the lovely ladies who bring us our meals and then the nursing staff who always have a smile and look after us in sometimes such worrying times"
Jan



Our team behind the scenes

At The Walton Centre, hundreds of non-medical staff help to keep the hospital running smoothly. We meet four colleagues whose work behind the scenes has a huge impact on our patients.



Pam Armitage - Medical Secretary

How many hats can you wear at once? That's the life of a Medical Secretary! We're a first point of contact for the patients, and the gatekeepers for our consultants – answering queries from the start to the end of every day. I've worked with Miss Catherine Gilkes and Mr Ajay Sinha for 10 years and really feel part of the team, with the surgeons and the specialist nurses. I'm never made to feel like 'just the secretary', but a crucial part of the team.

It's a real privilege to do this job, at the end of every job is a patient, sometimes going through the worst times of their lives. It can be stressful, but I try and treat the patients like they're a member of my family.

When someone calls and they're upset or frustrated, I find it really rewarding to be able to help, find an answer to their query or problem and reassure them. It really makes a difference – to their life, and mine.

Paula Bickley - Ward Clerk

As a Ward Clerk I look after the administration side of Cairns Ward, including making sure all patient information is correct before a patient goes to Theatre. I also help to cover emergencies on other wards and admin needs across the hospital.

Everyone makes a contribution to the care of our patients. Once, a patient's family lived far away and couldn't visit. I used to pass on messages from his wife, and had many chats and even sing-songs with him when he was upset and missing his family and his pets. Watching him go home was so rewarding, and he even sent me a photo with his dogs and cat which was lovely.

I love being part of a team and working on a really busy ward – we're a really good team, all working together. There's never a dull moment – every day is different!



Terri-Anne Scattergood - Bed Manager

It's all about the right patient, in the right bed, at the right time – that's the key to being a good bed manager. We manage patients from pre-admission right through to discharge, ensuring patient flow across the Trust to prevent delays in Theatres and timely transfers from ICU to the wards.

All three of our bed managers have a nursing background and have worked on the wards, so we have a good understanding of the patients' conditions and which ward is suitable and safe for them. We're supported by our discharge planner and administrator – both vital members of our team.

It can be very challenging – it's like a big jigsaw puzzle, constantly working against a clock, but everyone across the Trust pulls together to help and we always manage to find a bed for everyone. It's so rewarding once every patient is in, especially emergencies from other Trusts – they could be patients needing time-critical, life-changing treatment. It's the best feeling knowing they're in the hospital, and will get the care they need.



Steve Holland - Head of Estates

The Estates Team deals with everything – from the big to the small – to keep the hospital functioning and patient activity going. Every day brings its challenges, a scanner not working, a burst water pipe, a door lock not working, but this is a job I love.

I've been at the Trust for 15 years and have seen a lot of change; the development of the Sid Watkins Building, the installation of the iMRI scanner and the replacement of the entire heating system last year. The next big project is the Theatres refurbishment which will be very complex, and new to the whole team.

We have to balance strategic and capital planning with ongoing scheduled maintenance and reactive jobs – sometimes things get a bit hectic, but they always get done – if something is broken and affecting patient treatment or staff wellbeing, it's a priority. I work with a great team and we have great links across the hospital. I always feel proud to work in the NHS - it's like working in a big family at The Walton Centre, whatever role you work in.





(From left) Interventional Scrub Practitioner Tracey Blackburn, Consultant Anaesthetist Dr Jon Taylor and Interventional Radiologist Dr Richard Pullicino

Life-saving care

For over two years, The Walton Centre has been providing a thrombectomy service 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It was the first Trust to provide this for stroke patients in the north west, and is one of only nine in the country.

Thrombectomy is an innovative procedure which involves using guide wires and specialist equipment to remove blood clots from arteries in the brain.

Previously, patients from across Cheshire and Merseyside who were eligible for thrombectomy treatment were brought to The Walton Centre for this life-changing service between 8am to 8pm seven days a week. Outside of these hours, the service was not available anywhere in the region, leading to a potentially significantly altered outlook for patients.

Dr Richard Pullicino, Consultant Interventional Neuroradiologist, said: "Being able to offer this specialist procedure 24/7 means a significant improvement in treatment for stroke patients in the region. This procedure is most effective for those who have an ischaemic stroke when the treatment is started as soon as possible after the initial symptoms."

"The team were excellent"

29-year-old Jess Tierney from Runcorn had a stroke sitting at her desk during work in February. She had a thrombectomy at The Walton Centre and is now on her way to recovering.

She said: "It was really scary at the time, I couldn't believe that it was a stroke! When I came to The Walton Centre, I was quickly rushed in; the team were excellent.

"They were amazing at keeping my family in the loop on what was going on. It was so important to me that they knew what was going on, and the thrombectomy team did too. I still have pins and needles down my right hand side, but without the quick intervention I think I would've been a lot worse off."

Timeline of a thrombectomy

- Patient has symptoms of a stroke
- Ambulance takes them to their local A&E
- Diagnosis of stroke at the local A&E where thrombolysis treatment is administered if suitable
- If the patient meets the criteria for a thrombectomy, The Walton Centre is contacted
- If the patient is accepted for transfer, the patient is transported by ambulance to The Walton Centre
- Thrombectomy is carried out in a specialist treatment suite
- Following a CT scan to confirm no complications, the patient is returned to their local hospital for recovery

Since the 24/7 service started in October 2021, The Walton Centre has carried out almost 400 thrombectomy procedures, making a vital difference to patients from across the region.

Dr Pullicino added: "We work closely with Aintree Hospital, who are based on the same site, and have a 19-bedded HASU (hyper-acute stroke unit), dedicated to caring for people in the critical 72-hour period after a stroke occurs.

"Patients suitable for the specialist thrombectomy treatment can be transferred efficiently and effectively from here, although we also receive many referrals from all across the north west, North Wales and the Isle of Man – we are a vital regional resource."

Dr Sacha Niven, Consultant Neuroradiologist and Trust Lead for Thrombectomy, said, "As the UK's only specialist neuroscience Trust, The Walton Centre has long sought to pioneer the very latest techniques and treatment, in collaboration with its partners across the region, to save and change the lives of patients with neurological and neurosurgical conditions.

"It's been fantastic to see the difference this service has made to patients from across the region so far, and we hope it will continue to significantly change the outlook for stroke patients in our communities."

“It’s changed my life”

In recent years, John Bowden from North Wales was struggling to deal with growing sciatica pain.

Sciatica, where the sciatic nerve, which runs from your lower back to your feet, is irritated or compressed, usually gets better in four to six weeks, but can last longer. In John’s case, his spine was out of alignment, putting pressure on the nerve, causing debilitating pain.

The 77-year-old from Prestatyn got to the point where he was struggling to walk and get up without agonising pain. After a quick referral, John came to The Walton Centre for complex spinal surgery, to tackle the problem head-on.

He underwent robotic-assisted spinal surgery last year to alleviate his pain. The procedure involved placing screws in the vertebrae, fusing them together by inserting a metal cage and expanding the space where the sciatic nerve is.

He said: “I felt the back pain stop immediately after I woke up from the operation. The surgical team were incredible, and the nursing team were second-to-none.

“Since the operation, I’ve not felt the pain in my leg. Before, I had to be so careful about how I put my foot down, otherwise I’d be in agony. Stairs aren’t a problem anymore.”

John is one of the first 100 spinal patients at the The Walton



Centre whose operations were assisted by a groundbreaking robotic arm, which drastically improves accuracy of spinal screw placement and recovery times.

The innovative system involves a rigid robotic arm, tracked and fully navigated by a camera, which is then programmed to follow a trajectory pre-planned by surgeons. The robot is one of the first of its kind to be used in the NHS, which the spinal team began to use in October 2022.

John continued: “Since the surgery I’ve been able to do a lot more than before. I’m able

to stay on my feet for longer, which helps when I’m with the grandkids! It feels like I’ve got those years back; it’s changed my life.”

John and wife Gaynor also took part in the popular series *Trauma Room One*, which highlighted neurosurgery at The Walton Centre. The programme aired on 5Star towards the end of 2023 and you can watch the whole series on Channel 5’s catch-up player My5. John’s robotic spinal surgery features in episode six of the series:



Q&A with Miss Maggie Lee, Consultant Neurosurgeon

What does your role involve?

I am a Consultant Neurosurgeon with a special interest in complex spinal disorders. I completed my neurosurgical training at The Walton Centre and at Alder Hey Children’s Hospital, along with spinal specialist training in Liverpool and Manchester. I have several roles, but my main role involves diagnosing and managing spinal conditions in elective and emergency settings. Treatment can include surgical and non-surgical solutions.

As the Surgical Lead for Metastatic Spinal Tumours in Cheshire, Merseyside and North Wales, I work closely with Clatterbridge Cancer Centre in developing ways to improve care for patients with spinal metastatic disease and I also look after adolescents with spinal tumours transitioning their care to The Walton Centre from Alder Hey Children’s Hospital.

I am also NHS Education England’s Lead for Health and Wellbeing for trainees, providing support in this challenging landscape.

What kind of patients do you see and how do you support them?

As we are the only hospital in our area that provides elective and emergency spinal surgery, I see all spinal conditions. The majority of cases I see are due to wear and tear of the spine. These are rewarding, as surgery can alleviate pain and improve quality of life of the patient.

Some are more complex, requiring discussion amongst the complex spinal surgeons to formulate the best treatment plans.

Emergency cases involving spinal fracture and damage to the spinal cord are challenging as it is life changing for the patients and family. I can approach this in a holistic way with not only our surgical/trauma/critical care team, but also with our experienced therapy team to enhance patient recovery and rehabilitation.

What’s it like working at The Walton Centre?

I love it. As a neurosurgeon, I am privileged to be able to use my skills to improve patients’ quality of life. This is especially so when the Trust has a vision in investing in people, innovations, and technology – this helps me

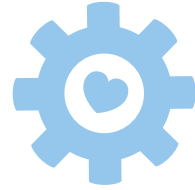
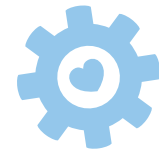
to do my job to great standards with pride. It is great coming into work where everyone has such dedication. Patients and family often comment on the friendliness and professionalism in our hospital. I really value having colleagues who are also driven to provide excellence in what can be challenging work for complex conditions.

What are some of the challenges you face in your role?

Our challenge as a team is that we are trying to provide the best care we can with the resources we have, whether it is time/space/specialism, especially after the pandemic. I am grateful that our patients recognise this and are ‘patient’ and understanding. We are supported by all the teams within the hospital, making the situation less of a challenge.



Our fantastic fundraisers



A night to remember



(From left) Tom Fairclough, Sophie Dunbavin and David Fairclough

The Jan Fairclough Ball, held in memory of the wife of our Charity Patron David Fairclough, saw an amazing £60,000 raised towards the hospital's latest appeal, to fund an Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) machine.

The OCT machine will help provide more accurate diagnoses and better monitoring of changes to the layers at the back of the eye which are affected in many neurological and neurosurgical conditions. It will also improve access to clinical research trials for

patients. Madeleine Fletcher, Head of Fundraising, said: "Thank you to everyone who made the Jan Fairclough Ball a success, and helped achieve our appeal target."

"Thank you to the Fairclough family for their fantastic commitment; our corporate partners A&B Engineering, Carpenters Group, Home Bargains and Philips UK. And, of course, thank you to all our guests and supporters who attended and donated to this amazing campaign."

15 years of fundraising

Pauline Higgins, who, together with her family, has fundraised for The Walton Centre for over 15 years, in memory of her son, Joseph Patrick Mullin, was awarded the Medal of the Order of the British Empire (BEM) in the New Year's Honours, for services to the community in Liverpool.

To celebrate what would have been Joe's 40th birthday, the family held a charity night in January

that raised over £2,500, taking their overall total to an amazing £67,500, all with the ongoing support of Joe's family and friends.

Pauline said: "It was a great honour to hear I had received an award which I was thrilled to accept on behalf of everyone that has helped us to remember and celebrate Joe during our many fundraising activities."

Going above and beyond

A former motorcycle racing sidecar competitor has raised over £10,000 for The Walton Centre Charity after lifesaving treatment at The Walton Centre following a crash whilst racing at the Isle of Man TT.

In 2018 Fiona Baker-Holden was competing on a sidecar alongside her father. The machine they were riding suffered a mechanical failure at 130mph.

Fiona suffered a broken neck, suspected broken elbow/dislocated shoulder, sprained ankle, brain injuries and tore the nerves which operated her right arm off her spine. She spent a month at The Walton Centre.

Fiona said: "The hospital gave me a second chance at life. I was so grateful for the level of care and attention I received, that I wanted to show my gratitude."

When the opportunity presented itself to raise money for the Sid Watkins Innovation Fund which funds innovation and new technology to help inpatients, Fiona jumped at the chance.

"Having spent my life involved in motorsports, it was amazing to have this link to Sid Watkins, the 'doctor' of Formula One," she added.

Over the past 12 months Fiona has donated proceeds from a book she wrote and published, charting the journey of her recovery from her accident, run 1000 miles around race tracks she used to compete at, held a charity night with motorcycle stars and completed a 12-day trek with her husband, John, to Everest Base Camp in Nepal.

Our supporters Walk for Walton



Our supporters once again pounded the pavements for Walk for Walton this spring. The virtual event saw our amazing fundraisers each walk 100,000 steps across the month of May, raising money for The Walton Centre Charity.

Judith Breese, who has taken part in all three years of Walk for Walton, said: "The

Walton Centre saved my life; I wouldn't be here without the amazing care I was given, the least I can do is to give back to the Trust."

Visit our website to see the latest Walk for Walton news, and to sign up to other events like this:
www.thewaltoncentrecharity.org

Coming up

 **21 June**
- The Jan Fairclough Summer Lunch



14 September
- The Walton Centre Abseil



28 September
- Walk for Walton Snowdon



15 November
- The Jan Fairclough Ball





**The
Walton Centre
Charity**
*Supporting Excellence
in Neuroscience*



GIVE A REGULAR GIFT TODAY

The Walton Centre is at the forefront of providing exceptional treatment and care for patients with neurological, neurosurgical and pain conditions. But to continue its groundbreaking work, it relies on the support of The Walton Centre Charity and the generosity of its donors.

Your monthly contributions can directly impact the lives of patients and their families. Donations help to improve the hospital environment, and contribute to purchasing new, exciting innovations and technology.

Give a regular gift today at walton.charity/regular-gift

