

# **Service Users' Forum**

**Walkergate Park Centre for  
Neurorehabilitation and  
Neuropsychiatry**



**Do you use the services at Walkergate Park, as an inpatient or an outpatient?**

**Are you the family 'Carer' or Supporter of somebody who uses the services?**

**If so, why not join our Service Users' Forum?**

## **What does the Forum do?**

Its purpose is to: -

- work closely with the staff and management to make the services at Walkergate Park as good as possible;
- talk with the management to make sure service user voices are heard and acted upon;
- make sure that service users influence policy and the way the Centre is run;
- help develop staff training and education, so that all services are patient-centred;
- give feedback to staff and management from service users about their experiences;
- make sure that all information is clearly understood by the service users in whatever format they need.

## **Who can join the Forum?**

- Anyone who is using Walkergate Park services or has used them in the past.
- Carers, relatives and supporters of those who use Walkergate Park services.
- Members of the public who have a specific interest in the services at Walkergate Park.

## **The Forum's origin**

Walkergate Park (WGP), which opened as a new treatment and rehabilitation centre in 2007, brings together the specialist services of Neurorehabilitation and Neuropsychiatry from across a large region in Northern England. Most of these services have their origins in Hunters Moor Hospital, while some inherit St.Nicholas's Hartside Unit and Prudhoe Hospital's Janie Hepple Unit. Professor Mike Barnes, an international expert in Neurorehabilitation, by his example and practice imbued the staff at Hunters Moor with a distinct 'culture'

of patient-centred awareness and care, for the benefit of service users and carers. He involved various volunteers with some Hunters Moor committees, to 'represent' the views of service users and carers, and encouraged a staff member (Helen Atkin) who had a distinct role of co-ordinating Patient Involvement practices.

Prof. Barnes was the driving force in getting WGP built. In the lead-up to its opening, Helen Atkin and the voluntary 'patient representatives' at Hunters Moor wanted to set up a 'Friends of WGP' group in which they could be even more active in a working dialogue with the staff. And so, after an embryonic period of some 3 years, the SUF was formed in 2008. A formal constitution was drafted, and this was adopted at the SUF's first Annual General Meeting in February 2010.

## **How does the Forum operate?**

All members (currently c.45) are invited to participate in planned meetings about five times a year. In addition a Steering Group of 7 members has been elected, to have more frequent meetings and to provide a fast-track response to issues raised by Management or Service Users.

This SUF is unique in the Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust, and is becoming widely known across the region.

Working with the Northumberland, Tyne & Wear Trust Management, members of the Steering Group represent the views of the SUF on the following Management Groups:

- Children & Young People in Specialist Services: Involving People Group.
- Walkergate Park: Involving People group (WPIP) – a staff and Service User interactive forum\*.
- Walkergate Park: Clinical Strategy Group.
- Walkergate Park: Quality Performance Group.
- Walkergate Park Carers Charter Implementation Steering Group.

We also have two Board members on the Foundation Trust's Board of Governors – one representing Service Users and a second representing Carers.

(\* WPIP is of major significance and, we think, unique: monthly meetings between SUF members and staff representatives – regular dialogue between staff, service users and volunteers working on equal terms for the same objectives.)

## **The Forum's recent and current activities:**

### **Exit Interviews**

Every consenting inpatient is given a structured confidential interview, by one of two SUF members, just before being discharged from WGP, and often a family 'carer' is given a separate interview. The aim is to get an honest account of the patient's (and 'carer's') experiences in WGP, so that standards can be maintained or improved and any short-comings quickly rectified. A quarterly report on comments received is made to WGP Management.

### **The 'Patient Experience'**

Staff have consulted the SUF on the way forward with work of recording the 'Patient Experience' and capturing the pathways taken by patients and their families/carers.

### **Audit on two-way feedback**

Two SUF members carried out independent and semi-structured interviews with many of the leaders of the various services offered at WGP, both in 2008 and as an up-date in 2010. This was to record how they obtained service user involvement in the planning, delivery and development of their services.

### **Staff Training and Induction**

SUF members have a slot in the Staff Induction Training Programme from 2011 to ensure all staff know of the SUF's existence and its aims.

### **Links with Commissioners**

The SUF recently gave evidence to an official formal visit of Commissioners to WGP. The SUF was able to produce reports, statistics and comments on both the quality of service delivery and the management of WGP from the service users' perspective. The meeting also demonstrated the effectiveness of having such a proactive and independent group working within WGP. The SUF has also submitted written comment on the recent Government White Paper on the restructuring of the NHS and the commissioning of services.

### **Carers' Charter**

Carers in the SUF are part of the Trustwide programme to develop and implement the strategy around the Carers' Charter. They are working with the Management and staff to implement and monitor the delivery at WGP of service standards set out in the Charter. They have also assisted with the planning and delivery of two very successful Carers' Conferences.

### **Knowledge Centre**

The Knowledge Centre opposite the main reception area has a very wide range of leaflets/booklets on all the disabilities dealt with at WGP, so it is an

important source of information for SUs and carers to assist them in their daily lives. It also has computers easily accessible for disabled people. One SUF member regularly helps here.

### **Research project**

Many SUF members have been involved in a major research project entitled 'Towards Inclusive Living', either as interviewers or being interviewed. This project, funded by a substantial research grant from the Department of Health, has been an excellent example of qualitative research – by SUs on SUs, for the benefit of SUs.

### **Catering**

The Café area was designed as a key service for staff, SUs and their families. But its open hours have been inconvenient, especially for family visitors travelling from all over the region. The vending machines have proved difficult to use and not an accessible option for people with diverse neurological conditions. SUF members are in a working group trying to effect changes, and their complaints have resulted in some improvements already. Also, the SUF found that many inpatients couldn't remember their orders for meals on the Wards when they had to be placed two days ahead; so it has asked for a pilot scheme of leaving a written prompt in the patient's room.

### **Car parking**

The SUF feels the number of specified Accessible Parking Bays (to be used with a Blue Badge) is too few on a site where so many visiting outpatients have a disability. A concession has been made which allows SUs with Blue Badges to park in standard bays if all designated Accessible Parking Bays are full. Other improvements are being urged.

### **Neuro-disability conferences and forums**

Conferences on specific Neuro-disability topics are held regularly, both at WGP and at other regional events. SUF members have contributed at such conferences where their experiences and opinions have been highly valued.

### **Open dialogues with staff**

At many SUF meetings WGP Service Leads (staff) regularly give talks on their service. These are great opportunities for all SUF members to get explanations, challenge, discuss and explore different ways of delivering the service with the professionals face to face.

## Conclusion

The above examples of SUF's activities and productive collaboration show that our relationships with WGP staff and local management are excellent, and work for the benefit of service users and carers.

**But** – the SUF remains independent, as a group of “critical friends” and “friendly critics” of the Trust and of the staff at Walkergate Park. The staff appreciate this role of ours, and we in turn have a very high regard for them. SUF members believe WGP is the “jewel in the Trust's crown”, and are proud to be associated with the quality of services offered here.

However, the SUF constantly needs new members, especially people who have recently been inpatients or are regular outpatients, so that it can continue to be well informed of experiences of the delivery of WGP services, and so ensure that quality is maintained (even in times of decreasing budgets) and, where possible, further improved.

So please join us!

## Further information

If you would like to join the Forum or need more information about it, please contact:

- Christine Lumsdon, Secretary  
Tel. 0191 266 5796  
Email: [gclumsdon116@btinternet.com](mailto:gclumsdon116@btinternet.com)
- Mick Bond, Forum member  
Tel: 0191 281 2171  
Email: [mick.bond@btinternet.com](mailto:mick.bond@btinternet.com)