

South Warwickshire Prostate Cancer Support Group

2023 Annual Report

1 Introduction

Our tenth year as a local support group has seen us settle into a pattern of bimonthly plenary meetings at the Old Leamingtonians Rugby Club that are also available online, and local meetings in the other months. The move to Old Leamingtonians was part of a plan to increase our availability to those in South Warwickshire affected by prostate cancer. Other elements of the plan included increasing our local groups, improving our website, and providing support to the PSA testing events offered locally by the Graham Fulford Charitable Trust (GFCT).

2 Our Development Plan – How are we doing?

a) Numbers

52 people (44 men and 6 women) attended at least one of our meetings in 2023. Thirty one of those people attended local groups and of these 16 men only attended local groups. Our numbers at the six plenary meetings started at 10 and our highest figure was 23 with an average of about 16. These numbers included both online and in-club attendance. Online figures ranged from 2 to 6 with an average of about 4. Our active membership has doubled from 25 in 2022 to 52 in 2023. I have had inquiries from or on behalf of 27 men in 2023 and of these 17 have gone on to attend at least one meeting.

b) Local groups

We started the year with two active groups, Shipston and Stratford, with the Leamington group in need of new leadership. We have ended the year with four active groups including a new group serving Alcester and a revived group in Leamington.

c) Plenary meetings

We had 6 large meetings at the Old Leamingtonians Club this year. Everyone is welcomed with a cup of tea or coffee, and this makes for a good atmosphere. We did not have a speaker for our January meeting as the time was given over to agreeing on the future direction of the group. In March we had our AGM, and it was very heartening to welcome on board a number of new committee members. Our speaker was Susan Hart from GFCT and she joined us online. She gave us a brief history of the Trust and its development since its beginnings in 2004 – an impressive and very important organisation for those of us with prostate cancer. In May our speaker was Emma Cummings from the South Warwickshire Foundation Trust where she is a Cancer Care Navigator. Emma was an encouraging speaker in that she is very committed to ensuring that all Prostate Cancer patients get the best possible service and don't get lost in what can be a complicated patient journey between Warwick Hospital and the Walsgrave Hospital. July brought Michelle Venter to our meeting, and she spoke about her work as an acupuncturist and what she can offer to help people with troubling side effects of treatment. Another persuasive speaker, and a number of us promptly arranged to have a consultation with Michelle. In September we had the pleasure of hearing a presentation from David Pashley about a recently published research study that showed similar survival rates for those who had radiotherapy, prostatectomy or active surveillance. The most important caveat in the presentation was that these were all cases of men with less aggressive forms of cancer and also that they were all

treated if they needed it as the trial progressed. A fascinating discussion. And our last plenary of the year in November included Mark Kelly, Peer Support Coordinator at Tackle Prostate Cancer. He stayed for all our meeting and was impressed to experience a hybrid meeting attended both in person and online – a first for him!

d) Finances

It was pleasing to have Andy Smith volunteer to be our treasurer, a post that we have had difficulty filling in previous years. This has not mattered a great deal as we have traditionally run on a minimum outlay, e.g. to cover rent of the room and coffee, by having a whip-round at the end of a meeting. However, our mission to expand the reach of the group will probably require some funding for which a bank account is essential. And so, it was Andy's first task to try to get us an account. To date we have gone through an assessment process with Metro Bank and Santander – in both instances only to be turned down. Recently David applied on our behalf to his bank – NatWest and this has been successful! All we need now is some money!

Two areas of expenditure were identified this year – the development of our website and a better microphone to improve the quality of sound for those attending online. An application to the Councillors' Grants netted £340 towards the website project. This sum was held on our behalf by the Shakespeare Hospice and was recently paid out in full. The cost of the conference standard microphone was covered by the Rotary Club in Henley-in-Arden. It was a great pleasure to be able to welcome Anna Devey, the Chairperson of the Club, online to our September meeting so that we could thank her in person.

e) Register as a charity?

This question has been posed for us by the feedback from Santander that they would only consider an application from a Registered Charity. We are currently a Small Charity with a constitution that limits our annual income to £5,000. Moving to a registered charity does not cost anything but it does have a number of consequences including an annual report to the Charity Commission that includes audited accounts. There are also requirements to show compliance with policies in relation to issues such as Safeguarding, Insurance and Health and Safety. At present the committee is not minded to pursue registration.

f) Supporting local PSA testing events

The focus of this activity has been attending the monthly PSA testing at The Nelson Club in Warwick. Derek Ford has taken the lead on this activity with a number of others volunteering including Paul and Cassie Cooper, Paul Burtonshaw, Tim Parry, Andy Smith, Owen Stafford and myself. We have had one or two volunteers at most meetings this year and are building our relationship with the GFCT. The advantage of doing this is that we get access to at least 100 men at each meeting, and they are already sufficiently aware of the risks of prostate cancer to have paid for a PSA test – some of them being regular attenders. All that we have to do is to turn up with some leaflets and develop our skills in engaging with the attenders, most of whom are very responsive to our approaches.

g) Other outreach activities

In January there was a seminar about Prostate Cancer held at Great Alne Park Retirement Village. The speakers were Doug, Dr Andrew Wallis (a local GP) and Lawrence Cramer People & Culture Director of Inspired Village Group. This was well attended, and a lot of men went for PSA tests at Dr

Wallis' surgery that week! The numbers attending also prompted the decision to set up a local meeting for the Alcester area.

Tim Parry encouraged us to engage with Warwickshire Golf Clubs as many of their members are men over 55 and so at risk for Prostate Cancer. Tim, Owen Stafford and I met with their Chief Executive, Chris Brown, in April. He agreed to put up posters for us in their member clubs in South Warwickshire. Producing this poster prompted a lot of discussion about whether we were promoting PSA testing or whether our emphasis was on spreading the word about our support group. In the end we felt that promoting PSA testing was primarily the role of GFCT whilst publicising our existence would only be done by us. Out of this debate came work on our logo and this produced a lot of artistic efforts, and eventually a logo!

3 Thanks

I would like to thank everyone who has been on the committee this year. We have met three times – all online. The progress recorded at the beginning of this annual report is a testament to their hard work and effective contributions. My particular thanks to David who has hosted the online meetings and has led the way on the website project.

The Publicity group which ensures that invitations to join our meetings get out to as wide an audience as possible has continued to do an excellent job. In addition to posters on boards we are now on many local and specialist national websites and increasingly in GP surgeries on their digital displays. This is essential work which is invisible to everyone except those doing the work! I would particularly like to thank Gill Meddins who liaises with local free papers to get us into their pages.

Thanks also to those who have organised the local groups: Paul in Leamington; Frank in Shipston, and me in Alcester and Stratford. I see these local groups as a key aspect of our growth and development, offering as they do the chance to talk in a meaningful way with fellow sufferers and survivors.

The staff of the Urology Department at Warwick Hospital have supported us as a group throughout our ten-year history. This support has included referring men, attendance at our meetings, providing speakers and responding to our emails as and when members get lost in or confused by the system! Ann and Theresa have been with us from Day One and continue to be part of our group and are key to us being an effective support to men with prostate cancer – a successful partnership.

And finally, my special thanks go to all of you who turn up and contribute to meetings, whether online or face2face, by sharing your experiences and knowledge, offering support and advice to each other. I have been impressed by the way that you reach out to each other in meetings, and it has been great to note that people are contacting each other outside of meetings where they have some particular concern to discuss.

Doug Badger

March 2024

