

# PHAROS

*A beacon of hope in the darkness*

*Newsletter of the Reading Prostate Cancer Support Group (RPCSG)*

*Issue 100: March 2020*

*Website: [www.rpcsg.org.uk](http://www.rpcsg.org.uk)*

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Welcome to the 100th issue of the newsletter, which is quite an achievement. The first issue was produced by the previous editor in June 2009 and has been published regularly since, always including summaries of the guest speaker talks each month, and occasional reports on developments in the field of prostate cancer. I hope that readers have enjoyed all the issues to date. I would like to remind members that in our web site under the 'Library' tab there is a list of topics that have been covered in talks and newsletters, and that against each topic you can click and read the newsletter that covered each topic.

## THE MARCH MEETING

Chairman Chris Addison introduced the evening with a welcome to all members and in particular to one new member, and one guest who is a relative of another member.

The first part of the meeting was a short AGM at which Chris Addison's tenure in office of Chairman was extended by two years. There then followed a talk by committee member Andrew Gabriel on the subject of 'Surviving Hormone Therapy'.

Andrew first listed the side effects of hormone therapy which were 24 in number. The main ones commonly experienced include hot flushes, enlargement of breasts, weight gain, muscle loss, changes in the levels of glucose, and emotional effects. Blood pressure can be affected, mostly by increasing but can also be reduced. Thinning of body hair can be a side effect, conversely a reversal of balding can take place.

The reason for the side effects is that prostate cell growth is driven by the male hormone testosterone, and hormone therapy can control or shrink prostate cancer and give a better outcome of radiotherapy.

Andrew then described some remedies for the side effects.

For hot flushes you can simply discard clothing, and keep a diary of events so that any triggers of hot flushes can be identified and avoided. Acupuncture had been effective for some people. Some drugs have been effective, such as Medroxyprogesterone which is recommended for a trial of 10 weeks and then discontinued if not providing any improvement, in which case drugs such as Cyproterone and Megestrol could be tried. Note that all of these drugs require a prescription and regular blood tests to check liver function.



*Andrew during his talk*

There are some remedies for reduction of libido and difficulties with erections. Communication with partners is vital and counselling can help. There are tablets that can help with erectile problems, the main ones being Viagra, Cialis, Levitra and Spedra (aka Stendra). Cialis is the drug with the longest acting effect and is sometimes prescribed in low dose (5 mg) taken regularly.

If none of the above is effective there are other remedies that produce erections and are useful if no natural erection is possible. These are based on the drug Alpostadil and produce erections. These remedies are:

- Caverjet - this is an injection into the penis
- MUSE - a pellet that is inserted a few centimetres into the end of the penis
- Vitaros - a cream that is rubbed into the penis
- Vacuum pumps with constriction rings. Unfortunately in order to control costs, these are not now necessarily obtainable from the NHS.
- Penile implants.

There are erectile dysfunction clinics that patients can take advantage of. Appointments at these clinics can be arranged during a consultation or treatment, by a clinical nurse specialist, or by your GP.

For breast tissue growth, remedies include the drug tamoxifen or localised radiotherapy.

Fat gain is due to the loss of testosterone and can cause raised blood pressure, cholesterol, or blood glucose. These are very difficult to remedy during hormone therapy but can be minimised by monitoring your body weight, taking regular exercise, being careful with food intake.

Exercise helps with many of the side effects, helping to counteract fatigue, muscle loss, memory fuzziness and erectile difficulties.

Osteoporosis (loss of bone density) can be counteracted by exercises that shock or stress bones, these include jogging, walking, weight lifting, and calcium and vitamin D3 supplements.

Pelvic Floor Exercises can help in cases of incontinence, these involve the tightening of the muscles that control the flow while urinating. It is recommended to carry out these clenching exercises about 50 times per day spread over several sessions. This should be increased to 100 times per day whilst increasing the clenching time for up to 15 seconds.

Lack of testosterone can cause mood changes. If suffering from anxiety or depression some help could be obtained from sources such as support groups, Macmillan, PCUK helpline, Counselling and the Samaritans.

Andrew was thanked for his very informative talk and was presented with a gift of appreciation.

{Editor's note: More information on carrying out Pelvic Floor Exercises can be found in our web site at the foot of the tab named 'Treatment Options'}

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## **THE WALK IN MARCH.**

13 people took part in the March walk, that started at the Flower Pot in Aston and visited the Deer Park. It was a very enjoyable occasion with good weather and a lunch stop was made at the Flower Pot on our return.

Photographs taken during the walk:



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## **CORONAVIRUS AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES**

Very shortly after the coffee morning of the 13th March the coronavirus seemed to appear quite suddenly and has had a serious impact on our way of life. We now find that social contact is to be avoided in the attempt to control the virus. Reluctantly we have cancelled all of our activities, i.e. the group meetings, walks, coffee mornings and awareness events.

We will monitor the position and will return to normal business as soon as we can. In the meantime you can visit our web site for information.



## INDOOR EXERCISE

During this time of restricted outdoor exercising there is another way to exercise indoors instead. Tessa Higgins, a gym coach with Macmillan Cancer Support runs classes via Zoom. Some of us have already participated and these are running at 2 pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I will send around another email soon with an application form on health matters, together with her email address, so if you want to join in contact her directly.

Very best wishes to all of our members and their families to remain safe and healthy during the virus pandemic.

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### **DISCLAIMER**

*This newsletter does not offer medical advice. Nothing contained in the newsletter is intended to constitute professional advice for medical diagnosis or treatment or to advocate or recommend the purchase of any product or use of any service or guarantee the credentials or appropriateness of any health care provider. Members are strongly advised to consult with an appropriate professional for specific advice tailored to their situation.*

*This newsletter may refer to named providers and their products or services, and such reference expresses no inference upon any aspect of any provider's business, services or products, and expresses no recommendation or preference for any such products or services.*

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY.**

**All activities have been cancelled  
due to the coronavirus, until  
further notice.**