

# PHAROS

*A beacon of hope in the darkness*

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

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## THE JUNE MEETING.

Our June RPCSG meeting was held using Zoom on the 5th June and was well attended by 46 people. There were two speakers, the first was Mr Philip Charlesworth followed by Tessa Higgins of Macmillan Cancer Support.

Mr Charlesworth is a consultant surgeon at the RBH and is a cancer lead for prostate, kidney and bladder cancers. He covered several topics in his talk, primarily local anaesthetic template biopsies, SpaceOARs, statistics on the Retzius sparing technique and the effects on treatments of the Covid-19 virus.

He described the effects that the coronavirus has had on surgery at the RBH. Surgical operations have been suspended for a while as it was thought too dangerous to operate during the pandemic. Referrals from GPs are about 20-30% of the usual. Things are returning to normal at RBH and will improve over the next few weeks but there will be some changes such as more consultations being carried out by telephone rather than face-to-face, and the rate of operations will be lower due to the need to sanitize everything between patients. A bulge in patient quantity is expected as patients resume contacting their GPs.

There have been some changes to the pathway over time. The system is now less dictatorial in that patients have more choice of treatment and self funding will be possible. For example a patient whose GP will not agree to PSA tests or MRI scans will be able to pay for these themselves. MRI scans are now routine before a biopsy and in the next few years more use of MRLinac will be used, which is MRI guided radiotherapy.

### Transperineal biopsies.

Biopsies are being carried out using local anaesthetic via the perineum rather than transrectal and there is a much reduced risk of sepsis. Transperineal biopsies give better yields than transrectal as more parts of the prostate can be sampled. A future development will be the use of MRI scans to direct the location of biopsy samples.

### SpaceOARs (Organs At Risk).

External radiotherapy is a common treatment for prostate cancer in which the prostate is irradiated from several different positions. The beam is focused onto the prostate so that the prostate receives the full dose of radiation, however there is some unwanted overspill of radiation into surrounding organs. The prostate is very close to the wall of the rectum and radiation leaking into the rectum can cause radiation proctitis.

SpaceOARs is a process that separates the prostate from the rectum using a gel, greatly reducing the effect of the overspill radiation. Prior to starting a course of radiotherapy a gel is injected between the prostate and rectum that pushes the prostate and rectum away from each other by up to two centimetres. This reduces any adverse effects on the rectum and allows higher doses of radiation that makes for a more effective cure.

The gel is injected through the perineum and remains in place for about six months by which time it has been broken down and expelled from the body as water. Mr Charlesworth said that

the hydrogel injection has been routine in private practice for about a year and is expected to become routine in the NHS in about a year or so.

### Retzius sparing.

Mr Charlesworth presented a slide showing an area known as the Retzius space that is in front of the prostate and next to the bladder and contains nerves associated with continence. The traditional frontal approach to prostatectomy causes some damage to this area and so a different approach has been developed whereby the prostate is approached from below and avoids the Retzius area. This is a more difficult method and only 3 or 4 surgeons are experienced in this technique in the UK, including Mr Charlesworth. It produces a much quicker recovery of continence that Mr Charlesworth illustrated in a graph comparing the traditional method with the Retzius avoidance method. His opinion is that Retzius sparing also has some improvement in recovery of erectile function but this has not been quantified.

There were then some questions from the audience.

In reply to whether a prostate transplant is possible, the answer is no, however in later life you do not need a prostate! The most important thing is to remove the prostate whilst causing as little effect as possible on continence and erectile function.

There have been some delays to treatment due to the coronavirus, but in the case of prostates no harm will have been caused. Patients waiting for surgery have all been given a date for their surgery, with priority on cancer patients.

SpaceOARs is less relevant to brachytherapy treatment but is used as brachytherapy can cause radiation proctitis. It is easier to apply to brachytherapy patients as they are under anaesthetic when it is applied.

Patients can if they desire pay privately for SpaceOARs and then continue their treatment with NHS. Mr Charlesworth wants to see many more NHS patients receiving SpaceOARs.

The penile shortening phenomenon was mentioned, and Mr Charlesworth said that this is caused by a reduced blood flow and no penile tissue is affected by prostate cancer treatment. A penis that has not had an erection for more than about a year could suffer actual shortening.

Mr Charlesworth was thanked for his very informative presentation.



Tessa Higgins introduced the topic of physical exercise. Before the coronavirus occurred she ran exercise classes in gyms but had to close these during the pandemic. In its place she runs classes by Zoom three times per week on Mondays (Muscle oriented), Wednesdays (General exercise and aerobics) and Fridays (Flexibility session). All start at 2.00 p.m. and last for about one hour.

Tessa showed a video of typical exercise activities and then replied to some questions and comments from the audience. She was thanked for her informative talk.

Anyone wanting to join the Zoom exercises can send an email to me and I will forward to you the joining instructions.



## **NEXT RPCSG ZOOM MEETING - July 2020**

We will hold a further RPCSG Zoom meeting on Friday 3rd July when the guest speaker will be Diane Wootton. She is a physiotherapist with a private practice to which many RBH patients have been referred. One of her specialties is the treatment of incontinence.

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## **RPCSG TALK AND WALK**

The main intention of our walks is to provide an opportunity for social chat with other members that we achieve by leisurely walks, so we now refer to these events as Talk and Walk. The walks have proved to be popular but had to be suspended due to the coronavirus isolation instructions. The rules have been relaxed to some extent recently such that we can gather in a group provided that we observe the distancing mandate. We intend to hold a Talk and Walk in July so although the distancing requirement will be an inconvenience that we have to observe, we expect that this will be an enjoyable occasion.

It is possible that the usual places that we use for our refreshments and lunch stops will be closed so we suggest that all persons attending should be self sufficient by bringing their own food and drink for a lunch stop that we will hold outdoors. A waterproof sheet would be a good idea in case benches are wet when we stop.

Provided that the coronavirus rules do not change in the meantime the walk will be on Tuesday 7th July starting at the Waterside car park at 10:45 a.m. and will go into Reading via Caversham. We will return probably via Reading Abbey and alongside the River Kennet.

Some of the places where we usually stop for toilet visits may be closed, but there is no need for concern as we have a Radar key for disability toilets of which there are at least two on our route.

Directions to the Waterside car park are to travel towards Reading on the A329M/A3290 and continue to the very end of the road which ends at a roundabout. Turn right at the roundabout onto Thames Valley Park Drive and the entrance to the free car park is about 20 yards on the left. If the car park is full you can continue past the car park entrance and park on the roadside free between 10:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. We will return well before 4:30 p.m.

The address of the car park is:  
Wokingham Waterside Centre  
Thames Valley Park Drive  
Earley, RG6 1PQ

A sat-nav using RG6 1PQ will take you beyond the car park so use the directions above as you approach Thames Valley Park Drive

All members are invited to this walk. No need to contact anyone, just arrive at the starting point before 10:45. If you have any queries about the walk please call Richard Brown on 07973 662925.

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*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.**

**Friday 3rd July 2020** will be a Zoom group meeting with guest speaker Diane Wootton.

**Tuesday 7th July 2020** will be a Talk and Walk from Waterside Centre to Reading.