

PHAROS

A beacon of hope in the darkness

Newsletter of the Reading Prostate Cancer Support Group (RPCSG)

Issue 112: April 2021

Website: www.rpcsg.org.uk

THE APRIL MEETING.

The April 2021 meeting was held by Zoom and was very well attended by 34 RPCSG members and 7 people from other support groups.

The guest speaker was Danielle Mills of the Medical Detection Dogs organisation. Danielle became aware of the Medical Dogs charity in 2015 and was so impressed that she became involved in fundraising and later as a speaker.

There are two types of medical dogs - Bio Detection dogs and Medical Alert Assistance dogs. Medical Alert Assistance dogs are paired with humans and live permanently with their owner. The Assistance dogs are mainly of the gun dog type rather than guard dogs, as the latter could try to prevent helpers from entering a property when their owner needs assistance.

Medical dogs start their lives in the organisation as puppies and have a socialising period in which they become socialised with humans and other dogs. At six months old they start their training. Bio detection dogs take about 4 months to train and an Alert dog can take up to 2 years to train. Each dog costs about £29,000 to train.

Bio Detection dogs work with samples and have no direct contact with humans, whereas an Alert dog is partnered with an owner and lives with them permanently.

Dogs can detect certain diseases by smell because cells are changed by the disease and produce volatile compounds in the bloodstream and these are removed by breath, urine or sweat. Each disease has its own signature smell. Dogs have a tremendous power of smell detection.

Samples for the dogs are provided by University hospitals and placed in a carousel. Each sample has a volume of only 0.5 ml. Dogs visit each station in the carousel in turn and if they detect the smell that they have been trained for, the dog either stands still or sits down at the sample. If the dog has correctly indicated at a sample it is given a treat in reward.

The projects being used are the detection of urological, kidney, bladder and prostate cancers and colorectal cancers. Two diseases that are being trialled are Parkinson's and Pseudomonus Bacteria, the major cause of cystic fibrosis. Dogs can detect Parkinson's by a swab of sweat taken from the back of the neck and this is encouraging pharmaceutical companies to show interest in treating the disease.

Other disease detection work is being carried out for malaria and a canine sensory project.

Detection of prostate cancer is being trialed. It is particularly difficult to detect early prostate cancer. The current PSA test has a high incidence of both false positives and false negatives. In a trial the dog's noses had an accuracy of 71%. The objective is the early detection of prostate cancer.

Medical Detection Dogs have been approached by the Government to investigate the detection of Covid-19 for which a sum of money was given to them for Phase 1 work. The data has been encouraging and has been passed to the Government. Dogs could eventually be used in situations such as airports and would be able to smell the presence of Covid in a person from a

distance of about one metre. Using six dogs 750 people could be tested in one hour, the detection being instant with no need for laboratory work.

Dogs are trained by giving them samples to smell, in which there is only one known positive sample. When the dog detects the known positive sample they are rewarded with a treat.

Medical Alert Assistance dogs are trained to alert, fetch help and attract attention of either their partner or other people and even bring medication to its partner. Partners are sufferers of life threatening conditions such as blood glucose including type 1 diabetes, and mitochondrial depletion. Danielle gave an example of a family in which a young child's blood sugar had to be tested every five minutes. With a trained Assistance dog there was no need to carry out these blood tests, as the dog was trained to alert when the child's glucose level was either too high or too low.

A story about a nut allergy dog showed how sensitive the dogs are. When the dog's partner met and talked to a couple the dog tried to pull the partner away from them. The man in the couple remembered that he had had some peanuts with a beer the previous day, and the dog was able to detect this even after the elapsed time.

An Alert dog has helped a man with severe PTSD. They give more independence. They can also reduce hospital costs. Another story is that of a lady who had been in hospital for 3 years with type 1 diabetes that doctors could not control. She obtained an Alert dog 5 years ago and the dog alerts her around three times per day. The lady has not made any callouts since obtaining the dog and has thus saved the NHS a cost of about £½ million in that time.

School children have benefitted by having an Alert dog in school.

Danielle then showed a video of a lady with diabetes whose life has greatly benefitted as her dog Frankie alerts her if her blood sugar falls below 4.5 or rises above 12.

Dogs are accredited annually for their wellbeing and their detection abilities are monitored by MDD. The dogs are retired when their performance falls and the dog's partner can then choose either another dog or keep the dog as a second pet. MDD will find a good home for retired dogs.

Medical Detection Dogs receive no funding from the Government, they rely on donations. To continue their work they need an income of about £6,800 per day.

Danielle finished by saying that their web site www.medicaldetectiondogs.org.uk has a section devoted to trials on prostate cancer.

Danielle was thanked for her fascinating talk. The RPCSG will make a donation of £100 to the Medical Detection Dogs charity.

The MDD web page concerning prostate cancer can be seen in this link:
<https://www.medicaldetectiondogs.org.uk/prostate-cancer/>

NEXT RPCSG ZOOM MEETING - 7th May 2021

The May group meeting will be held by Zoom **on Friday 7th May at 6:45 p.m.** We are very fortunate to have Mr Paul Rogers as a guest speaker. Mr Rogers is a consultant oncologist at the RBH and will talk about his role at the hospital with a focus on prostate cancer and its treatments.

A link for the meeting will be sent to all members shortly before the meeting.

RPCSG WALK

We held a successful walk in April from Aldermaston Wharf to Woolhampton with 12 members joining in. The weather was great and although hospitality venues were still closed we enjoyed a stop for our own refreshments alongside the River Kennet.

The next walk will be on **Tuesday 4th May 2021** and will be a repeat of a previous popular walk, from Pangbourne to Goring. The walk will be about 4½ miles and the return will be by a short train ride back to Pangbourne. You can bring your own refreshments if you prefer, but now that the coronavirus rules have been relaxed there will be several places at which we can stop and purchase refreshments.

The walk will start at 10:45 from a car park in Pangbourne. The car park is pay-and-display costing £2 for 6 hours. Be sure to purchase a ticket and display it. To arrive at the car park drive into Pangbourne on the A329 and turn into Whitchurch Road (B 471). After about 100 yards turn left into the car park. If you use a sat-nav the postcode RG8 7BS will take you close to the car park entrance.

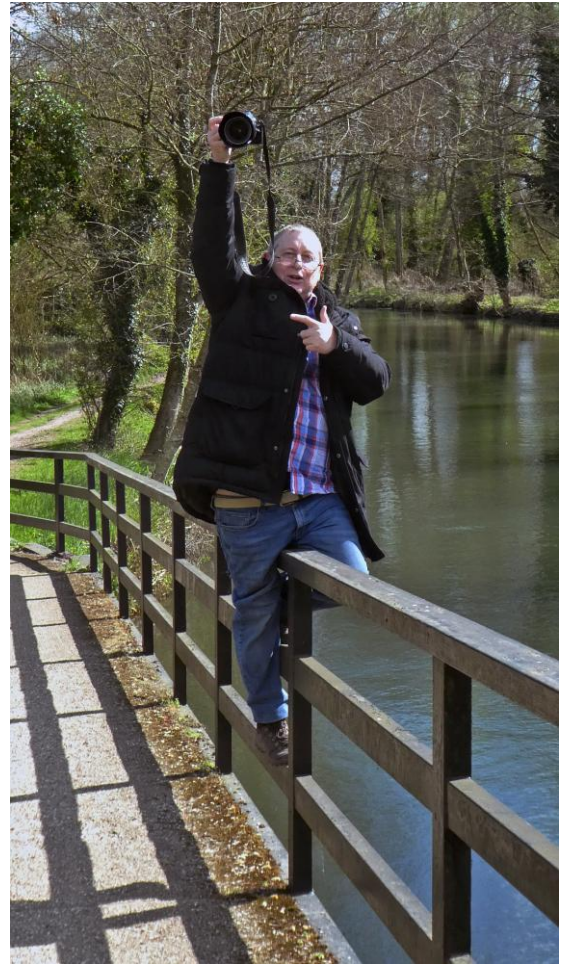
Partners are also welcome to this walk. If you have any queries please call Richard Brown on 07973 662925.

COFFEE MORNING

It was very pleasant to be able to resume coffee mornings in April. The weather was great and about 12 members arrived. We will hold another coffee morning on **Tuesday 18th May** at The Flower Pot in Aston from 11:00 a.m. We will again be in the rear garden of the pub which has plenty of space for us to meet and observe social distancing.

Photographs taken during the April events:





Coffee morning in the garden of The Flower Pot

Steve's unique photographic technique

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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.

Tuesday 4th May 2021 is a walk from Pangbourne to Goring. Start time 10:45 a.m.

Friday 7th May 2021 is an RPCSG Zoom meeting with the guest speaker Mr Paul Rogers.

Tuesday 18th May 2021 is a coffee morning at the Flower Pot from 11:00 a.m.