

## **INSIDE**

Spinal cord stimulation first: 'I don't feel like I have MS anymore'

Redcar's first endoscopy unit opens its doors

NHS urgent care services in Tees Valley to be jointly run by health groups



# TALKING POINT

Spring 2024



## **Patient Engagement Portal puts outpatients in the driving seat**



# Getting to know our new CEO

**THIS year, Stacey Hunter officially became the first group chief executive officer for our trust and North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust.**

Stacey is no stranger to the NHS, in fact she's worked within it for 37 years, originally as a nurse and in several different leadership roles. While the nature of the work she does may have changed over the years, she says the reasons she does it have very much remained constant...

## What does it mean to become the first group CEO?

It's an absolute privilege. Since starting the role in February, I've had the pleasure of visiting various teams across the two trusts and I've been blown away by the energy, commitment and pride everyone has demonstrated.

Whilst I recognise that there are some differences between the two trusts, the people who work in our teams are aligned in their passion for ensuring our communities receive high quality care and patients and families have an excellent experience.

I've had the pleasure of visiting various teams across the two trusts and I've been blown away by the energy, commitment and pride everyone has demonstrated.

By working even more closely together we can be even better and make sure that the services available for the people who live in Tees Valley and North Yorkshire are absolutely first class.

## What are your priorities for the next year?

My first priority is to transition and settle well. I want to spend as much time as I can with people who live here to understand what matters to them.

I also want to look at making sure that we've got equitable access to services for people whether they're living in Northallerton or across in Hartlepool and everywhere in between.

And then thirdly, I want to make sure that we've forged really good partnerships with some of the other local partners. Health doesn't operate as a kind of island just



Stacey Hunter

in hospitals or our community health teams. We're part of a much broader set of partners and we need to work together to really secure the benefits for the local area.

## What do you like doing outside of work to relax?

I've got an eight-year-old Spaniel called Finn, who has a very special place in my heart, and we got a new puppy called Daphne before Christmas who is occupying lots of time and attention. When I'm not out dog walking, I like to go sailing. I'm still more enthusiastic than I am competent but I'm very keen and enjoy getting out on the water.

## It's official!

**WE have signed our partnership agreement with North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust and North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB).**

This is a key milestone in the formation of our new hospital group which will enable us to work together to deliver better outcomes for our patients and the wider population across the Tees Valley and beyond.



Group CEO Stacey Hunter, ICS chair Sir Liam Donaldson and group chair Derek Belling signing the partnership agreement

# Spinal cord stimulation first: 'I don't feel like I have MS anymore'

A FORMER A&E sister who has suffered from chronic pain in her legs and arm every day for ten years says a new spinal cord stimulator has changed her life that much, she no longer feels like she has multiple sclerosis (MS).

Jo Mohan, 51, from Coulby Newham, was one of the first patients in the UK and Europe to be fitted with Medtronic's new Inceptiv™ spinal cord stimulator at the Friarage.

Inceptiv™ is a tiny surgically implanted device which has two wires inserted in the spine, close to the nerves responsible for carrying pain signals.

It sends low levels of electricity directly into the spinal cord to disrupt pain signals before they reach the brain.

Although South Tees has been offering implantable devices for pain management at its hospitals for patients who suffer from back pain for some time, this is the first time a device has been fitted that is able to deliver multiple waveforms and can detect signals from the spinal cord and automatically adjust the strength of the impulses accordingly.

When it senses the patient's movement, such as when they cough, sneeze, strain, or bend over it automatically adjusts itself to avoid painful shocks and improve pain relief.

Despite taking medication and trying a variety of treatments, Jo's chronic pain caused by her MS has intensified over the last decade.

Knowing that Jo was suitable for the innovative spinal cord stimulator, Ashish Gulve, clinical lead and consultant in pain medicine, offered her the chance to be one of the very first patients to be fitted with the Inceptiv™ device.



Dr Gulve and the team involved in fitting the first Inceptiv™ spinal cord stimulators

"Dr Gulve asked if I wanted to give it a try and I didn't hesitate to agree," she added.

Jo, who says she didn't have very high expectations for the device after suffering from pain for such a long time, was taken into theatre at 3pm and was discharged home on the same day.

A couple of weeks later, after her wound had healed, the device was turned on and her life changed.

"I'm shocked that it's worked, I've gone from constant pain to nothing – I don't even feel like I've got MS anymore. Thanks to the device my symptoms have settled down, yes, they still flare up now and then, but I'm in no pain."

Dr Gulve said: "It was a privilege to be the first NHS trust in the UK to offer this new state-of-the-art spinal cord stimulator for our patients who suffer from back pain."

"I'm shocked that it's worked, I've gone from constant pain to nothing – I don't even feel like I've got MS anymore."

Jo Mohan





# Redcar's first endoscopy service opens its doors

**PATIENTS can now have more diagnostic tests closer to home thanks to the launch of a new endoscopy service at Redcar Hospital.**

Every year South Tees carries out 14,000 endoscopy tests - examinations which look inside the body using a long, thin tube with a small camera inside called an endoscope.

The new dedicated clinic at Redcar Hospital will save some patients from having to travel to James Cook or the Friarage while also reducing post-pandemic waiting lists and freeing up teams at James Cook to concentrate on more complex cases.

Patients have been using the service since November but it was officially opened in March by the trust's new chief executive officer Stacey Hunter and Redcar patient Timandra Lowe.

Nicola Plews, Redcar endoscopy unit manager said: "We've already welcomed patients from all over the Redcar area and from as far away as Whitby and they think it's great.

"It's a fantastic facility for people to come to with free parking and it's staffed by experienced clinicians who rotate from our James Cook site."

A range of specialist minimally invasive tests are now also provided exclusively from the Redcar site including:

- Lower GI capsule – patients swallow a pill-sized camera to check abnormalities
- Capsule sponge – patients swallow a small capsule which is attached to a string and dissolves to reveal a tiny sponge that collects cells for examination

Vicki Fawcett, lead nurse for the video capsule endoscopy service,

said "We are now performing 47 capsule endoscopies and 13 capsule sponge examinations a month at Redcar.

"A lot of the patients we see can be quite anxious, but these community-based clinics are in a much calmer environment which really helps us put people at ease."

Arvind Ramadas, clinical lead for endoscopy, added: "It's brilliant to be providing a range of endoscopy services from this community hospital site including our flagship minimally invasive procedures.

"The new service provides more choice and a relaxing environment for patients, saves people from the Redcar area from having to travel and helps us reduce our waiting lists – it's great news for everyone."

"The new service provides more choice and a relaxing environment for patients, saves people from the Redcar area from having to travel and helps us reduce our waiting lists – it's great news for everyone."



Chief executive officer Stacey Hunter and Redcar patient Timandra Lowe (left) officially open the new endoscopy unit at Redcar

# Patient Engagement Portal puts outpatients in the driving seat

**THOUSANDS of outpatients are managing their appointments digitally at the touch of a button thanks to our new Patient Engagement Portal (PEP).**

Last year, the trust teamed up with digital health company DrDoctor to launch a new portal as part of its ongoing commitment to improving outpatient care by introducing new technology and innovations.

PEP puts outpatients in the driving seat of their hospital care in the most convenient way – making it easier for them to manage their appointments on their smartphone, tablet or PC.

Patients who have provided us with a mobile phone number are now receiving appointment reminders and digital outpatient appointments via text messages from 07860 039 092.

Since the beginning of the year, over 60,800 digital outpatient letters have been uploaded to the portal. 71% of patients who viewed their letter electronically have decided to remain digital first in their communications. On top of that, over 60,000 text message appointment reminders have been sent.

In addition to sending quicker communication to patients, the portal also supports the trust’s green plan by reducing the number of paper letters sent as patients can quickly access vital appointments and clinical information digitally.

Jay Garratt, digital programme manager, said: “The PEP is a huge transformation in how we communicate with patients. It’s fantastic to see our outpatients embracing a digital culture and accessing their appointment information electronically.” He added: “The portal is already empowering thousands of our outpatients to be more involved in their care.

“The first stages of the roll-out involved using DrDoctor to check if patients still needed their outpatient appointment, followed by digital outpatient letters and text message appointment reminders, but the possibilities are much greater than this as the portal will ultimately

allow us to provide more choice for our patients.

“At the same time, we understand that digital communication isn’t for everyone. Those who have opted out or haven’t viewed their digital letters within 48 hours will be posted a paper copy automatically.”

Sam Peate, chief operating officer, added: “Moving our outpatient appointment communications to a digital hub means we are now

able to deliver information to patients in a format that works best for them.

“There are many benefits to not just our patients but also to our organisation and administrative teams; it has helped us transform our outpatient department and the quality of service we can provide.

“With thousands of text message reminders and letters already being sent digitally, trust staff are spending less time on administrative processes, freeing up more time for patient care and improving the utilisation of clinical patient appointments.”



Digital programme manager Jay Garratt and outpatient improvement manager Tallulah McCue



# Valentine's Day baby helps dad with maternity ward proposal

A MIDDLESBROUGH couple celebrated Valentine's Day with the birth of their baby and a marriage proposal on the maternity ward at James Cook.

Jamie Taylor and Bella Jenkins became proud parents of Paloma Taylor on Wednesday 14 February at 10am – bringing joy and happiness to their lives.

Whilst still celebrating Paloma's arrival on the maternity ward Jamie, 34, dressed her in a special baby grow which said 'mummy will you marry daddy?' on it and got down on one knee – just two hours after their little girl entered the world.



Paloma Taylor

With an ending that would even make St. Valentine proud, Bella, 25, said "yes" to a nervy Jamie while holding precious Paloma in her arms – making it all official.

"However, her late entry to the world meant I had to ask the much-awaited question on Valentine's Day which was a pure coincidence, but I am glad that it happened."

This surprise gesture by Jamie melted Bella who said: "I am extremely overwhelmed. This was unexpected and I am still in shock."

Talking about how he felt with little Paloma's birth, he added: "I am just on the top of the world. There's nothing more I would want now and feel everything is complete."

Jamie said: "It wasn't pre-planned at all to propose to Bella on Valentine's Day. Paloma was due to be born on Sunday 11 February and I was waiting for her birth to pop the most important question.

It was a match made in heaven for the Middlesbrough couple and a lovely story to be remembered for many years to come.

Congratulations.



Jamie Taylor proposing to Bella Jenkins

LOVE was also in the air in the neonatal unit at James Cook. Here's a few photos from the day, if you look close enough you might spot a few familiar faces.



# NHS urgent care services in Tees Valley to be jointly run by health groups

## PEOPLE with minor injuries and illnesses are set to benefit from a jointly run NHS urgent care service across the Tees Valley.

The service will be run by an alliance of four health organisations including our trust, North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust, The North East Ambulance Service and the Hartlepool and Stockton Health GP Federation.

From 1 April the partnership will oversee services, including urgent care centres at the University Hospital of Hartlepool and the University Hospital of North Tees and the urgent treatment centre at Redcar Hospital.

Services will be further enhanced by the creation of the new urgent treatment centre at James Cook.

It follows a formal procurement exercise run by the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB).

Kevin Moore, clinical director for emergency care at North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust, said: "This new alliance will bring together expertise and resources from across the region so that patients can have the highest standard of care.

"Urgent care services across the area are helping ensure people get the right help at the right time for a whole range of minor injuries and illnesses."

Andy Hebron, clinical director for emergency care at South Tees said: "Patients should continue to contact their GP or 111 for their non-urgent health issues, but if they have a minor illness or injury that needs attention, our urgent care and treatment centres across the region are available to help.

"The centres will also help keep our emergency care departments free for what they are there for – emergencies."

Stephen Segasby, chief operating officer at North East Ambulance

Service, said: "The ambulance service is now so much more than just a transportation service, and our advanced practitioner team already have a proven track record of delivering out of hours care alongside our colleagues in North Tees.

"This new alliance builds on the success of that, providing us with a fantastic opportunity to work together to provide a better service for our patients by improving the consistency of service provision across Tees Valley."

Lucy Falcus, medical director at Hartlepool and Stockton Health, added: "In the future urgent care services will be easier for patients to navigate, as the care provided will be the same whether you live in the North or South Tees area.

"We are excited to be involved in keeping this service local to patients and staffed by local doctors and nurses."



Kevin Moore, clinical director for emergency care at North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust; Josie Hale, operations manager at North East Ambulance Trust; Lucy Falcus, medical director at Hartlepool and Stockton Health; Andy Hebron, clinical director for emergency care at South Tees (left to right)

SOUTH  
TEES  
STARS

THE STARS Awards present an opportunity to recognise the individuals, teams and services that go above and beyond their role in delivering excellent patient care.

Congratulations to the winners and to the hundreds of staff who were nominated.

You can also nominate your colleagues or teams that have made your day by the going the extra mile. Search STARS Award on the intranet to make a nomination.

**Carol Larkman**  
– Dealing  
with Difficult  
Situations

Carol Larkman was recognised for helping a patient and his family during a difficult time.



South Tees  
**STARS**  
shine  
brightly

**Jayne Verrill** – Going the  
Extra Mile

Jayne Verrill won a STARS Award for going the extra mile. We are grateful for all your work, Jayne!

**Tim Lowes** – Attention  
to Detail

Tim was applauded for providing outstanding educational supervision and pastoral support to trainees over the past year.

The nomination said: "Tim provided excellent support to a trainee who suffered a serious injury during the last 12 months."

**Bini Mathew** – Respect,  
Caring and Support

Bini Mathew, one of our international nurses, won a STARS Award in the Respect, Caring and Support category.

Her colleagues described her as kind, caring and a true team player. She was applauded for being supportive of her HCA colleagues.

The nomination said: "Bini should be recognised as the best international nurse who always supports her colleagues."





## Clinical coding team – Teamwork

Our next STARS Awards winner is the clinical coding team, who were recognised for their impeccable teamwork.

The team was praised for supporting each other and ensuring targets continued to be met with key deadlines reached.

The nomination said: “The team is working so hard to continue the high level of service they provide at times of increased activity across the trust.”

Keep up the good work team.



## Yasmin Adamson – Helping Others

Yasmin Adamson won a STARS Award for helping others. As a fantastic ward clerk on ward 14, Yasmin successfully organised a wedding for a patient. Right from securing a photographer, a singer and a wedding cake to organising a buffet – Yasmin did it all.

The nomination said: “She spent hours outside of work taking calls, answering messages and organised everything to ensure the day was perfect and to support the family.” Thank you for all your hard work, Yasmin.

## James Urwin – Communication

James won a STARS Award for being incredibly helpful and supportive.

Since recently joining the trust’s pain service, he has hit the ground running. Patients are always sharing positive feedback about his communication skills and friendly manner.



# Nation's first pilot programme for syphilis screening launched in James Cook

**JAMES Cook's emergency department has launched the nation's first pilot programme for syphilis screening for adults aged between 19 to 70 – who already have their blood sampled at A&E.**

The pilot programme will also include routine testing for HIV, Hepatitis B and C, and will run for eight weeks from January.

Patients are informed if they are receiving a test for blood-borne viruses but can decline if they wish.

The ambitious initiative aims to understand if it's an effective practice to screen people attending A&E for these viruses.

The screening programme is successfully rolled out around the country where there are high levels of infection of HIV, hepatitis B and C, and syphilis.

It has been successful in identifying people with undiagnosed infections

as well as people with these infections who've been lost to care.

Clinical director for infectious diseases, David Chadwick said: "We are very excited to be doing this project, along with our emergency medicine colleagues the trust.

"As well as contributing towards national targets to eliminate hepatitis C and HIV, this will be the first pilot programme nationally to include syphilis screening and may help to establish whether this is worth including in other ED screening programmes around the UK."

The opt-out testing will enable the emergency department team

to identify any undiagnosed infections and offer early treatment whilst preventing further transmission of infections.

The team will contact the patient to arrange an appointment if they have received a positive result and will discuss the next steps.

Individuals can assume their tests to be negative for HIV, hepatitis B and C, and syphilis if they do not hear anything within 28 days.

Catriona Lane, emergency department consultant, said: "It is fantastic to be able to help link our emergency department into such an important programme.

"It will not only help us to identify new patients but also those who may have dropped off the system and help give them the treatment they need."

Clinical director for emergency department Andy Hebron, emergency consultant Catriona Lane, nursing sister Charlotte Walker, emergency nurse practitioner Mandy Jones, staff nurse Tilly Adamski (left to right)





# Lydia becomes world's first recipient of cutting-edge hearing device



Lydia French

## A COCHLEAR implant patient at James Cook has become the world's first recipient of an advanced hearing device.

Lydia French, 66, was fitted with an Advanced Bionics CROS (Contralateral Routing of Signal) device on her non-implanted ear.

A cochlear implant is an option for those individuals with severe to profound hearing loss that is not helped by hearing aids.

Adult patients normally only receive one cochlear implant on the NHS and may be fitted with a hearing aid in the non-implanted ear in a bid to help with binaural hearing – which is the ability to hear clearly in two ears.

However, Lydia, from County Durham, was missing out on sounds as her non-implanted ear did not have any useful hearing to be fitted with a hearing aid.

To help overcome this obstacle of limited hearing, the cochlear implant team fitted an Advanced Bionics CROS device on Lydia's non-implanted ear.

Lydia said: "I feel very honoured and excited to be fitted with the hearing device at James Cook.

"When I listen with the CROS device, the sound feels 'rounder' and I find it

easier to chat with friends and family in a noisy environment."

The device fitted on the non-implanted ear acts as a microphone and combines with the cochlear implant ear to become a single system – offering recipients an opportunity to listen with two ears without any barriers.

"Having better access to sound on my non-implanted side means I don't need to ask for repetition as often, and I feel more relaxed and comfortable when I am out socialising or listening in a car," Lydia added.

The device is currently offered to Advanced Bionics cochlear implant patients in James Cook and has several benefits such as improved speech intelligibility in noise when speech is presented to the unaided ear, enhanced quality of hearing and better speech understanding in noisy environments and many more.

Consultant ear, nose and throat surgeon Anirvan Banerjee said: "It's great to hear of this achievement and I am very proud of the team.

"The North East Regional Cochlear Implant Programme (NERCIP) team is truly exceptional in their commitment to adopting technology that benefits patients. It's commendable that they have taken such proactive steps to implement this for the appropriate patients.

"A big 'thank you' is definitely in order for the IT (information and technology) and IG (information governance) teams at the trust for their prompt management of governance."



Advanced Bionics CROS device

# First nurse to join research team straight from university

**A NEWLY qualified nurse has become the first nurse in the region to join a research team straight from university instead of going for the traditional nursing route.**

Middlesbrough native Joseph Nicholson always had a passion for nursing and a curiosity to venture into the world of research.

Following the completion of his nursing degree in 2023, he was determined to utilise his passion and curiosity to give back to his local community.

After scrolling through countless opportunities and job openings, the 26-year-old applied for the role of clinical research nurse at the Tees Valley Research Alliance, part of North Tees and South Tees Hospitals' alliance.

However, this was not easy for Joseph, who was fresh from university, as nurses opting to go into research possess years of clinical experience.

Although this isn't essential to apply for any research roles, it is considered highly desirable by interviewers.

During the interview, Joe's confidence and his motivation to excel in research stunned the interview panel, and after a competitive interview process,

Joe was offered the role of clinical research nurse in September 2023.

He said: "I knew this was quite a unique opportunity and I was surprised when I found out that I was the first

newly qualified nurse to enter research in the region.

"Research is a vital part of nursing and is a big part of the future of the NHS. So, I was shocked to learn that research isn't a route that has evolved into incorporating newly qualified nurses."

Talking about his research, he added: "My research is focused on trauma and orthopaedic services. In research, the patient is at the centre of everything we do. One of the fundamental aims of research is to look at the gaps of evidence that currently exist in patient care and treatments to seek ways that we can improve patient care via evidence-based trials."

Research team lead Kerry Colling said: "I'm delighted to be supporting Joe being the first regional newly qualified nurse within the research delivery workforce. Joe has brought a richness to the team and I'm looking forward to see his career reach new heights."



"Research is a vital part of nursing and is a big part of the future of the NHS."

Joseph Nicholson



# £2million research trial could make sunken chest wall surgery available to more patients

**HEART experts on Teesside are hoping to make sunken chest wall surgery available to more patients on the NHS after securing £1.9million to run a national clinical trial.**

James Cook is one of only two hospitals in the country to offer pectus excavatum (funnel chest) surgery on the NHS, but it is currently only available to patients with very severe physiological symptoms.

It is hoped the RESTORE trial - which compares the benefits of surgery against having no treatment and is funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) - will show what is clinically effective and whether this is cost effective for the NHS.

More than 200 patients from across the country are expected to take part in the trial, led from South Tees - and for some the results could be life changing.

"Although we have the pathway for very severe patients, lots of patients still can't have access to NHS care," said consultant cardiothoracic surgeon Enoch Akowuah.

"The trial will work out if it is clinically effective and if it's cost effective for the NHS. If these two things are proven to be true, the NHS could reopen pectus surgery for everybody - it's a huge responsibility.

"This is a fantastic opportunity which brings together our clinical excellence, research excellence and our new cardiovascular clinical research facility and it could really make a difference to patients."

Pectus excavatum is a condition where the front of the chest is sunken. This is caused by abnormally

shaped ribs. In mild cases problems can be purely cosmetic, but in more severe cases it can impact on heart and lung function causing symptoms such as breathlessness.

Consultant cardiothoracic surgeon Joel Dunning added: "We are delighted to be the pectus centre for the north and to have been selected as the site to lead this national £2million trial.

"It means we will be able to help improve the lives of so many people."

Caroline Wroe, clinical director for NIHR Clinical Research Network North East and North Cumbria added: "We are delighted that this research is coming to our region.

"It is an excellent achievement for the cardiology research team to be selected to lead the trial."

For more details visit [www.southtees.nhs.uk/services/heart-chest/chest-wall-service](http://www.southtees.nhs.uk/services/heart-chest/chest-wall-service)



Enoch Akowuah, Maria Stokes, Stacey Stockdale, Rebecca Maier and Joel Dunning (left to right) in the cardiovascular clinical research facility at James Cook

# Middlesbrough hospital recruits 100th patient to PACE nodes trial

**THE trust's radiotherapy department has reached an important milestone by recruiting its 100th patient to a national cancer trial.**

James Cook was among the first centres to start recruiting patients to the Post Advances in Comparative Evidence (PACE) Nodes trial in September 2022.

The study is for men with high risk localised prostate cancer, deemed suitable for stereotactic body radiotherapy (SBRT) and planned for 12 to 36 months of hormone therapy.

It compares delivering conventional stereotactic radiotherapy (SBRT) to just the prostate with delivering it to both the prostate and lymph nodes.

Previous clinical trials have shown that delivering SBRT to the prostate is a safe treatment for men with low and intermediate risk localised disease.

They now want to find out whether additional targeting of the lymph

nodes, alongside the prostate, can further reduce the risk of prostate cancer returning in patients with high-risk disease.

Consultant in radiotherapy and oncology Darren Leaning, who has recruited many of the 100 patients to the study, said: "Patients are allocated to one of two treatment arms – prostate alone SBRT or prostate and pelvic node SBRT.

"Importantly, this treatment delivers a potentially curative dose of radiotherapy in only five treatments over two weeks instead of 20 treatments over four weeks.

"Together with data from previous trials, this trial could lead to an immediate change in clinical practice, giving men the option of a more convenient new treatment that reduces the risk of their cancer coming back."

Keith Harland, radiotherapy research team lead highlighted that the Middlesbrough hospital is currently one of the highest recruiters to the trial across the UK.

"Importantly, this treatment delivers a potentially curative dose of radiotherapy in only five treatments over two weeks instead of 20 treatments over four weeks."

He added: "Key to successful recruitment has been the collaboration across all our teams employed in the treatment of prostate cancer and their determination to offer all patients the best possible radiotherapy treatment."



James Cook's radiotherapy department staff



# What have you done today to help boost someone's health and wellbeing?

**MAKING Every Contact Count (MECC)** is a national approach to behaviour change that uses the day-to-day interactions that health and social care staff have with people to support them in making positive changes to their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

MECC officially launched across South Tees in January and we are urging everyone at the trust – not just healthcare professionals – to get involved.

MECC focuses on lifestyle issues that can make the greatest improvement to someone's health such as stopping smoking, reducing alcohol, looking after mental health and cost of living support.

Whether it's sharing healthy lifestyle messages with friends and family or signposting a patient or colleague to local support services, a small conversation can make a big difference.

**MAKING  
EVERY  
CONTACT  
COUNT**



## Get Involved

- Register for MECC training – visit our MECC intranet pages where dates will regularly be added.
- Check out the region's very brief intervention and signposting tool at [www.meccgateway.co.uk/nenc](http://www.meccgateway.co.uk/nenc) so you know what's on offer.

## Your MECC stories



A friend of mine has struggled with asthma all their life. This has limited how far she has been able to walk; especially lately. This vicious cycle is also affecting her mental health. I have encouraged her to increase her physical activity, ensuring she has the correct medication, footwear and reminded her of how her breathing and walking improved when she has previously been more active. I am delighted to say that even in this cold weather, she has just started walking again. She ensures that she wraps up warm and has been gradually increasing the distance that she walks. I have promised her that I will be joining her on one of her walks, as I also need to keep active and would enjoy her company.

**Ruth Mhlanga**



During a conversation with a colleague I noticed she seemed a little tired and stressed. I asked her if she was ok and she said that she had recently noticed an increase in her drinking during the week, having a couple of glasses a wine almost every night after work to help unwind. She was feeling more tired lately and this was affecting her mood and motivation. We spoke about the benefits of cutting down and the positive impact that this would have not only on her health but also on quality of sleep and energy levels. I told her about the DrinkCoach service that provides online coaching, tips and support for cutting down.

**Michelle Stamp**





The Indigo Team

# Hundreds of vulnerable pregnant women benefitting from specialist midwife team

**HUNDREDS** of vulnerable pregnant women and birthing people are benefitting from specialist maternity support on Teesside, thanks to a newly developed midwifery team.

As part of the maternity unit, the 'Indigo Team' was formed to provide bespoke care and individualised plan to pregnant individuals – who are identified as vulnerable or at risk.

Since its inception in 2023, more than 283 women have been referred to the Indigo Team. This includes pregnant women suffering from poor mental health, severe anxiety and depression, personality disorders, childhood trauma, teenage pregnancies, female asylum seekers, learning disabilities and many more.

They often find it challenging to engage with the hospital staff due to their history, which may lead to adverse effects on the care they receive during maternity.

Various reports relayed severe disparities for women on Teesside such as falling in the top ten percent of deprived areas nationally; a region with the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in England and Wales; a high percentage of childbearing women struggling with their mental health and more.

This highlighted an urgent change of direction in how maternity services were provided to vulnerable pregnant individuals.

Community midwifery manager Gina Blewitt understood the need for a different approach to care was needed for these individuals – where their and their unborn child's health was in danger of slipping into further risk.

As a result, she set out to establish a specialist team where these women could access enhanced care – without any judgments.

She said: "In 2024 it still astounds me that women still die having babies. We now know that women's social complexities and vulnerabilities are putting them more at risk of poorer outcomes for themselves and their babies."

Lead specialist midwife for vulnerable women Rachel Fairbairn secured funding for a new midwifery team from Middlesbrough Council and Redcar Council through the national 'Start for Life' initiative.

As a result, the Indigo Team was formed and since then, they have

successfully recruited two full-time specialist midwives and five full-time maternity support workers.

To help identify at-risk expectant mothers and provide personalised care that caters to their needs, the team devised a complex social need assessment tool.

The assessment tool promotes an individualised assessment considering various factors and how they intersect into account. This includes those who are victims of domestic abuse and illegal trafficking, female asylum seekers, suffering from poor mental health or are pregnant teens.

Utilising the assessment tool women are allocated to the most appropriate pathway of care. Either a specialist midwife will be assigned to the individual, or a joint approach where the individual would have a traditional community midwife and an enhanced maternity support worker.

Gina added: "We are very grateful to the local authorities and the LMNS (Local Maternity and Neonatal System) for providing the funding to help establish the Indigo Team.

"It has enabled some of our families with the greatest need to access support and care that is tailored to their individual needs."



# New tongue-tie clinic brings care closer to home

**BABIES in Teesside are now receiving specialised tongue-tie support closer to home following the launch of a specialised clinic at James Cook.**

The new clinic offers holistic breastfeeding support and tongue tie-division, which can help mums to continue breastfeeding and reduce symptoms associated with tongue tie.

Previously, parents and their newborns who are accessing care within South Tees had to travel to other trusts as far as Newcastle or County Durham.

But thanks to the new partnership with Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland Family Hubs, newborn babies, aged up to 12 weeks old, are now receiving the care they need in Middlesbrough.

"We are delighted to be able to offer this regular service in Middlesbrough as we know it'll make a huge difference to our patients in Teesside and North Yorkshire," said Laura Paterson specialist midwife for infant feeding.

"For a number of years, we have relied on referring to other trusts, which at times carried a bit of a wait, by which time many families had given up breastfeeding or accessed private.

"In 2023 alone, we referred 102 babies to other NHS tongue tie services.

"We hope that having our very own clinic in the paediatric day unit at James Cook will give babies the best possible start to life and improve their long-term health."

"It's clear from the feedback that we've received so far that the service has been a great opportunity to enhance the continuity of care between midwifery and health visiting services."

Laura added: "We would like to say an enormous thank you to Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland Family Hubs who have jointly funded the equipment and staff training for this new service."

In the first six weeks after it was launched, the weekly clinic, which is run by Laura and Sarah Winspear, specialist health visitor for Redcar and Cleveland, provided 32 babies specialist feeding assessment and support, 22 of those had to tongue tie treatment at the Middlesbrough hospital.

Charlotte Cooney, 29, is among those who have benefited from the new clinic after her three-week-old son Ellis underwent tongue tie division.



Charlotte Cooney and her son Ellis (image credit Helen Wells Photography)

She said: "I'm a really determined person and have always wanted to breastfeed but I honestly think if it wasn't for the clinic I would have stopped. It definitely saved our breastfeeding journey."

Sarah Winspear said: "It's clear from the feedback that we've received so far that the service has been a great opportunity to enhance the continuity of care between midwifery and health visiting services.

"It's really good that we can now assess in the community, invite families into a local service and if needed provide continuity of ongoing support at home following their appointment."

Laura Paterson and Sarah Winspear



# Trust achieves national recognition for liver services

**SOUTH Tees has become the first trust in the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System to gain national recognition for its liver services.**

The liver team, which is based at James Cook, was awarded the Improving Quality in Liver Services (IQILS) level 2 accreditation by the Royal College of Physicians (RCP).

The IQILS accreditation is awarded to the liver services teams across the country, who have displayed the best practice quality standards covering all aspects of a liver service, including person-centred care, clinical care and the workforce.

Initially, the hospital team achieved level 1 accreditation in 2022 and worked tirelessly to climb the ladder and gain the prestigious level 2 award.

The assessment team highlighted the ‘astonishing’ pace of progress made by the liver team over the years.

The service was also applauded for being ‘extremely well-led’ at all levels with a ‘strong and clear vision’ and the

positive impact on its services due to collaborative working with North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust.

Darren Craig, consultant gastroenterologist and liver service lead said: “I’m delighted that the trust has been recognised by the Royal College of Physicians for our work in improving liver services.

“This IQILS accreditation is the result of an enormous amount of hard work from the whole team and demonstrates our commitment to providing excellent care for our liver patients.

“Liver disease is a leading cause of death in England and Wales, with the northeast particularly badly affected.

Hence, why we must continue to invest in and develop liver services and research across the Tees Valley.”

Chief medical officer Mike Stewart added: “This accreditation demonstrates that we are providing high-quality liver services for patients including clinics, inpatient care and outpatient services.

“Well done to everyone involved.”

“This accreditation demonstrates that we are providing high-quality liver services for patients including clinics, inpatient care and outpatient services.”

The clinical team consists of three liver consultants, a specialist trainee and two advanced nurse specialists supported by an administration and management team.

They investigate and manage a wide range of liver conditions ranging from abnormal liver blood tests to

liver failure and are also working on further public health projects related to liver disease.



Ahmed Monier, Claire Connelly, Zoe Cox, Steph Goodman, Eman Alabsawy, Tim Hardy and Darren Craig (left to right)



# Midwife improves digital inclusion

**THANKS to digital midwife Grace Murray more women and birthing people who are pregnant in the South Tees area are benefitting from better access to their digital maternity care records.**

Grace’s project aims to make smart devices and internet access more readily available for people unable to access their digital care record for any reason. This is helping to improve access to digital technology and addressing healthcare inequality.

As outlined in the Better Births report, the NHS aims for everyone accessing maternity services to have access to a digital care record, by 2023/24.

However, two million UK households struggle to afford internet access and 10 million lack the most basic digital skills.

The North East and North Cumbria in particular has high levels of digital exclusion and has one of the highest percentages of non-internet users in England.

Other than midwives keeping paper notes, Grace found there were no alternative solutions available to help women access their digital care record, if they did not own a smart device or have access to the internet.

After initial research found alternative solutions lacking, Grace approached the Hope Foundation, which aims to reduce digital poverty and offers basic digital skills training to people living in Middlesbrough.

Through their Furbdit programme, Grace registered to become a drop off point for used devices, which she could then distribute to anyone who needs them.

Additionally, she applied for funding from the Online Centres Network and the National Data Bank. This gives Grace access to SIM cards which can be used by women and birthing people who meet specific criteria.



Grace Murray

*“Through this project, I feel like I can confidently say that we’ve been able to achieve every woman having equal access to the records digitally if they wanted it.”*

Thanks to Grace, maternity staff are communicating with their patients more easily through a smartphone app.

Additionally, the project is contributing to the NHS’ sustainability goals, by minimising the use of paper records and reusing unwanted devices that would otherwise go to landfill.

Grace said: “Through this project, I feel like I can confidently say that we’ve been able to achieve

every woman having equal access to the records digitally if they wanted it. I would love to be able to stand up at the end of next year and say that every single woman in the North East and North Cumbria has had exactly the same opportunity to access the records.”

Although the project is still within its early stages, Grace has already managed to help lots of women access their digital maternity records. Future plans for the project include digital skills workshops at family hubs and improving internet access for pregnant women living in areas without signal.

# Volunteers Coffee Lounge searches for more volunteers

## A CAFÉ in the heart of James Cook is looking for enthusiastic volunteers to join its team.

The Volunteers Coffee Lounge is not only an oasis for many but has also helped thousands of patients, their families and hospital staff.

All profits the centre makes are donated back into the hospital in the form of equipment and services.

The tireless team, who have raised more than a million pounds to help patients and staff over the years, are now looking to expand their team and need people who can offer a minimum of four hours a week.

Georgina Oakley, the Volunteers Coffee Lounge's manager, said: "For the last 18 years I have had the privilege of being manager of the Coffee Lounge and have had a team of incredible staff and volunteers working by my side – currently our youngest is 17 years old and the oldest is 91."

Once signed up, volunteers will serve customers in either the Coffee Lounge or in one of the tea bars in the Endeavour Unit, main outpatients or the chemotherapy department at James Cook.

Duties also include clearing tables, cleaning and handling cash, although this is optional and not a necessity.

Georgina added: "You really do get a lot of satisfaction from volunteering, sometimes the smallest of gestures make the biggest difference especially for those who are in hospital and may be having a really difficult time."

"You really do get a lot of satisfaction from volunteering, sometimes the smallest of gestures make the biggest difference especially for those who are in hospital and may be having a really difficult time."

If you know anyone who might be interested in volunteering, please ask them to contact Georgina by emailing Georgina.oakley@nhs.net or calling 01642 854886.

Anyone over 16 years old can volunteer and there is no upper age limit, however you must be physically able to fulfil the duties of the role.



Georgina Oakley and some of her team

## Happy retirement Linda

### AFTER 47 years of loyal service, Linda Lane has retired from the NHS.

Linda spent 47 years working in neurosciences, starting out as a "pinky" (domestic) on the neurosurgical ward at Middlesbrough General Hospital where she went on to become a health care assistant.

In more recent years, she has worked as an admin assistant, predominantly in the neuro/spinal pre-assessment team.

Linda's manager described her as

"loyal and dedicated with a genuine desire to help people."

Not only has Linda been a highly valued and respected colleague, but she will continue to be a very dear friend to many.

Linda added: "I have loved my time working in the NHS. I can genuinely say that I have thoroughly enjoyed every role that I have had and I have made lots of lovely friends along the way."



Linda Lane



**TALKING POINT**  
Spring 2024

**NHS**  
South Tees Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

**INSIDE**  
Spiral cord stimulation first: 'I don't feel like I have MS anymore'  
Robotic liver endoscopy wins award for safety  
NHS urgent care services in New Valley to be jointly run by health groups

**Patient Engagement Portal puts outpatients in the driving seat**

DESIGN  
PRINT  
SUPPORT



To advertise in this publication please call the sales team on 01302 714528

Rossington Hall, Great North Road, Doncaster, South Yorkshire DN11 0HR  
01302 714528 | [www.octagon.org.uk](http://www.octagon.org.uk) | [info@octagon.org.uk](mailto:info@octagon.org.uk)

# Stairlift Solutions

**SSAFA FORCES Help**

**NEKPA**

## Rent a Stairlift from **£350** per year...

**This covers installation, servicing and repairs during office hours. Anything out of office hours will include a £40 call out fee. We only ask for a minimum contract of 12 months.**

For an efficient and friendly service and all enquiries please contact either Chris or David who will be happy to help

**Telephone: 01325 307473**

**"A lift in the right direction..."**

**[www.stairliftsolution.co.uk](http://www.stairliftsolution.co.uk)**



## Find your new home in Teesside

Persimmon Homes have developments across the Teesside region and as a NHS worker you could make the dream of owning your own home a reality with our special NHS offer.

When buying your dream home we will give you up to **£20,000 to spend as you wish\*** meaning that you will be able to move into your home stress free.

Please see the locations of our developments below and get in touch with our friendly sales advisors who will be able to help you find your dream home.



### Open developments

- Harebell Meadows, Stockton on Tees, TS21 1AU
- Coatham Vale, Darlington, DL1 3NG
- Orchid Gardens, Middlesbrough, TS5 7YZ
- Saffron Gardens, Middlesbrough, TS8 9FX
- Kingsbrook, Northallerton, DL6 2FQ
- Marine Point, Hartlepool, TS24 0GA

### Coming soon developments

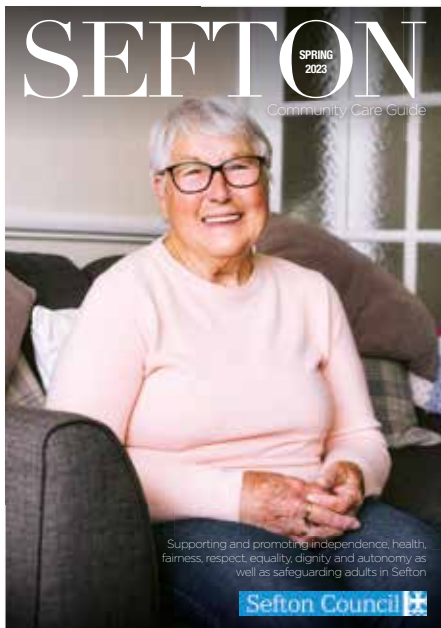
- Greatham Meadow, Hartlepool, TS22 5PT

Visit [persimmonhomes.com](http://persimmonhomes.com) or call **01642 660 200†**

\*Terms & Conditions apply. Please ask a Sales Advisor for full details. YOUR HOME MAY BE REPOSSESSED IF YOU DO NOT KEEP UP REPAYMENTS ON YOUR MORTGAGE. Imagery is for illustration purposes only. Details correct at time of going to press. †Calls will be charged at five pence per minute from a BT landline and may cost considerably more from mobile and other phones. Contact your provider for more details.

# Quality publications, that cover a specific **demographic** to help your business reach new **customers**

Advertising opportunities available in our staff magazines, care directories, and independent living guides



## CARE DIRECTORIES

County, City and Borough Council care directories are comprehensive guides to nursing care, residential care and independent living support. Created for individuals and their families exploring the possibility of moving to nursing/residential care or seeking advice and support to continue living independently at home.

## NHS STAFF MAGAZINES

NHS publications are circulated throughout hospitals to staff, patients and visitors on a regular basis. Advertising within the publications enables companies to promote their services to NHS employees and are an excellent way to increase their customer base within this very targeted audience.

## OPTIONS CARE AND INDEPENDENT LIVING GUIDES

Options provides older people with important information from health organisations such as CQC, ICB and the NHS. Circulated through various healthcare professionals including Council social work teams, NHS hospital discharge, community nurses, and various age related charities.

To advertise in any of our publications in your area please contact us below



**Email us:**  
info@octagon.org.uk



**Call us:**  
01302 714528





CHARLES CHURCH



## Find your new home in **Teesside**

Living in your dream Charles Church home can be easier than you think with our special NHS offer.

We have two great offers that could make that dream a reality, choose from either **Part Exchange + up to £10,000\*** or up to **£25,000\*** to spend as you wish. So whether you are a first time buyer or looking to move to your next home please visit one of our exclusive developments to find out more.

### Open Developments

- **Hunters Edge**, Eaglescliffe, TS16 0QA
- **The Oaks**, Wynyard Estate, TS22 5UG

### Coming Soon Developments

- **Roseberry View**, Nunthorpe, TS7 0NG



Call us on **01642 660200†** or register your interest at **charleschurch.com**

\*Terms & Conditions apply, please ask a sales advisor for full details. Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage. †Images for illustration purposes only. Details correct at time of going to press. ‡ Calls will be charged at a maximum of five pence per minute from a BT landline and may cost considerably more from mobile and other phones. Contact your service provider for more details.



# be green

print on paper sourced  
from sustainable forests



## Hop to it be green!

**Brainstorm** are a friendly and experienced graphic design company based in South Yorkshire, which specialises in the creation of printed media including magazines, brochures, annual reports and exhibition materials. We provide a comprehensive graphic design service, starting from the initial concept, to the actual delivery. Brainstorm combines innovative design and attention to detail, to offer you a service like no other.

**BRAIN  
STORM**  
GRAPHICS

info@brainstormgraphics.co.uk  
Tel: 01302 714528

# thirteen

Managing and building homes

## Looking for some extra support?

### We have a range of apartments and bungalows that provide:

- Safe and secure housing
- 24/7 support from on-site staff
- Private and modern living spaces
- Communal areas
- And much more!

### Extra care could be for you if:

- You're referred to us by a local authority

- You or a partner either have a medical condition or are over 55 and require support with daily tasks
- You're interested in having your own space with care and support facilities available
- You'd like a property that caters for your individual needs

 [www.thirteengroup.co.uk/supportedliving](http://www.thirteengroup.co.uk/supportedliving)

 0300 111 1000



Scan Me