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TALKING POINT

AUTUMN 2026

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Dear reader,

Welcome to the autumn edition of Talking Point.

This edition is packed with stories from our hospitals and community sites, showcasing the incredible work taking place every day.

We begin with a very important feature on how we are taking a zero-tolerance approach to violence and aggression towards our staff. In 2025, more than 1,400 incidents were recorded across University Hospitals Tees, reflecting a concerning national trend. No member of staff should feel unsafe when at work, which is why we are taking action. Thank you to our brave colleagues for sharing their experiences.

You will also read about how healthcare organisations across the Tees Valley have come together to demonstrate their commitment to improving the health of local people and reducing the health inequalities many continue to face.

Elsewhere in this issue, you'll find information about our annual staff flu vaccination programme, including information about where and when staff can get their free jab.

This is also a very special edition of Talking Point, as it will be the last published in this format.

For many years, our staff magazine has helped us celebrate colleagues, share achievements and tell the stories that make our trust special.

As we continue our journey as University Hospitals Tees, from 2027 we will be bringing our staff magazines together to create one shared publication.

I know Talking Point means a great deal to many of you. It has a long and proud history, and I want to reassure you that this is not about losing something valuable. It is about building on our legacy and evolving it for the future.

As our teams continue to come together, we have an exciting opportunity to create a magazine that reflects who we are today and where we are heading together. It will celebrate the very best of both trusts, shine a spotlight on our incredible colleagues and provide a shared voice across University Hospitals Tees.

I hope you enjoy reading this final edition and will pick up a copy of our brand-new magazine when it launches in the new year.

Until then, please enjoy this latest issue.

Best wishes,

Stacey Hunter

CHIEF EXECUTIVE
UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS TEES

Keep up-to-date with University Hospitals Tees

From career stories to innovations in patient care and more, follow University Hospitals Tees on social media to keep up with the latest news.

- LinkedIn: University Hospitals Tees
- TikTok: @UniversityHospitalsTees
- Instagram: @NorthTeesAndHartlepoolNHSFT

Dog therapy sessions improving mental health for spinal patients

For spinal patients spending weeks or even months in hospital, a much-loved animal therapy session is providing a welcome boost to mental wellbeing.

Some patients at the Golden Jubilee Regional Spinal Cord Injuries Centre, at James Cook, face limited mobility. This can prevent them from leaving the unit, leaving them feeling isolated and disconnected from everyday life.

"Therapy dogs have the power to lift spirits and make people smile, including staff."

Thanks to generous funding from Caremark Redcar and Cleveland, patients have been able to make new four-legged friends through a dog-assisted therapy service. The sessions take place in the spinal injuries unit garden, bringing the benefits of animal therapy directly to patients.

The care provider funded ten free dog therapy sessions for patients at the unit, who have praised the friendly canine visitors for improving their mental health and having a positive impact on their care.



Elizabeth Donlan with Kyro

This includes regular visits from dogs like Kyro, who is accompanied by a trained handler/carer and a spinal staff member. Kyro takes patients from the spinal injuries unit on walks around the hospital grounds before spending time playing and interacting with them.

Spinal patient Rebecca Garnett, 37, said: "The dog therapy sessions have been pretty great and have had a positive impact on me."

According to recent studies, animal-assisted therapies have been shown to help alleviate anxiety, reduce stress and provide a calming effect on the nervous system through the release of oxytocin.

Miles Woolfenden, a student physiotherapist from Teesside University, saw first-hand the smiles that the dogs have brought to patients. He said: "It's lovely for the patients to have that interaction with the dogs."

Spinal HDU manager Lyndsay Wilson added: "Our patients can be admitted into the spinal HDU and rehabilitation ward for several months, with life-changing spinal cord injuries. Therapy dogs have the power to lift spirits and make people smile, including staff. Thank you to Caremark for raising this money for the sessions and being part of our patients' recovery and rehabilitation."

Michelle Jackson, managing director of Caremark Redcar and Cleveland, said: "We are delighted to support the dog therapy sessions at the Golden Jubilee Regional Spinal Cord Injuries Centre and to see the difference they are making to patients' wellbeing."



Miles Woolfenden with Kyro

How University Hospitals Tees is gr



North Tees nursing sister Leanne Powell and emergency department manager Laura Pennicott

From prosecuting violent offenders and refusing treatment to abusive patients, to introducing body-worn cameras, University Hospitals Tees is taking a zero-tolerance approach to violence against staff.

"Which violent incident would you like to know about? Violence in the emergency department is constant," said an emergency department staff member at The James Cook University Hospital.

University Hospitals Tees recorded more than 1,400 incidents of violence and aggression across its hospitals in 2025 alone. Staff report verbal, physical and racial abuse from patients and visitors, reflecting a wider national trend of rising violence and aggression against NHS staff.

As part of the organisation's zero-violence approach, staff in James Cook's emergency department are now wearing body cameras in a bid to deter individuals from being aggressive.

A few miles away, the emergency department in the University Hospital of North Tees is also planning to introduce body-worn cameras after the growing threat of aggression from patients and families.

Leanne Powell, nursing sister in the North Tees emergency department, was treating a patient who had suffered wounds to her arms, in an incident she recalls from several months ago.

She explained: "The nurse I was working with in triage briefly left the room to collect dressings. While she was gone, the patient took a knife – which was a large Stanley knife – from their pocket and gave me the knife, stating this was how her arms were cut.

"I moved the knife to the other side of the desk and continued the assessment. The patient remained calm and cooperative, then asked what I would do if she took the knife back. The patient suddenly jumped from her chair and attempted to grab it. I secured the knife first, but she pushed me back into the chair.

> "As I tried to leave, the individual grabbed my hand, attempted to take the knife, and pushed me against the wall while holding my wrist."

rappling with violence against staff

"As I tried to leave, the individual grabbed my hand, attempted to take the knife, and pushed me against the wall while holding my wrist.

"I was able to use the tannoy system to ask for help and within 30 seconds, staff and security came to my rescue."

The patient was later prosecuted for their actions.

An unnamed staff member at James Cook has also received verbal, physical and racial abuse.

They recall: "I remember this one incident where a patient was brought in by the police to the emergency department. I offered him water and, without warning, he tackled me to the ground."

The staff member, who now wears a camera while working, believes the initiative is making an impact as aggressive patients try to control their behaviour when they are made aware of the camera.

"I want to say how proud I am of the outstanding professionalism of our staff – who in the face of aggression – continue to provide the best care to our communities."

Laura Pennicott, emergency department manager at North Tees, said: "We are developing plans to equip our staff members with cameras in the future, similar to the approach taken by the James Cook team. Staff members are empowered to withdraw or delay treatment when patients or visitors behave aggressively, except where immediate clinical needs or capacity issues require further management."

It's not just A&E staff experiencing abuse at work. Sarah Brooks, lead nurse for the therapeutic care team, says her team in James Cook has reported some of the highest levels of violent incidents outside of A&E. Many of the incidents faced by her team are by patients who have cognitive impairment, which can sometimes be a way of communicating an unmet need.

She said: "By supporting both patients and ward teams, we strive to reduce escalation, keep patients safe, and create environments where everyone feels supported. While the team is committed to helping others feel safe, we also want to emphasise the importance of their own safety and wellbeing while delivering this vital care."[LT1.1]

Chief executive for University Hospitals Tees, Stacey Hunter, added: "All NHS workers have the right to feel safe at work to allow them to provide the best possible care to our patients.

"I want to say how proud I am of the outstanding professionalism of our staff – who in the face of aggression – continue to provide the best care to our communities.

"We have taken a zero-tolerance approach to violence, and we will ensure we do everything to make our staff and patients feel safe at University Hospitals Tees. This means refusing treatment where appropriate, pursuing legal action against offenders, and working even more closely with partners, including the police and local councils."



James Cook therapeutic care volunteer team with ward 24 staff

Specialist rehab team helps Diana get home

A specialist team at the Friarage has been credited by a former patient for enabling her to return home and reclaim her independence.

Diana Scott-Brown, who is over 80, underwent a major spinal decompression surgery at James Cook in April because the nerves and cord in her spine were being squeezed, causing neurological problems and putting her at risk of worsening symptoms.

The surgery was crucial in enabling the Husthwaite resident to continue her day-to-day life activities.

Following her surgery, Diana was referred to the specialist inpatient stroke and complex rehabilitation team on the Rutson ward at the Friarage, which provides care and rehabilitation for patients who have experienced a stroke or other medical conditions as part of their hospital-based recovery.

Recovering from major spinal surgery can be challenging and Diana required specialist rehabilitation to rebuild her strength, mobility and confidence.

> "They are the reason I am back in my home and regaining my independence once again."

As part of this, she began a personalised rehabilitation programme and was encouraged by the rehab team to work on her progress during her hospital stay.

This included strength and balance exercises, mobility training and support with everyday activities to help her regain confidence and independence.

The culmination of the rehab team's efforts ensured Diana was able to recover her strength and body function.

Lucy Keenan, clinical lead physiotherapist in stroke and complex rehabilitation, explained that rehabilitation is crucial for patients such as Diana as they would find it challenging to lead an independent life without the service.

After two months of rehabilitation, Diana was ready to be discharged home after demonstrating that she was able to lead an independent life.

Diana said: "I would like to thank the team for all their hard work and efforts. They went above and beyond for me, and I was never a bother to them. They have been passionate, friendly and always brought laughter and positivity to the ward. They are the reason I am back in my home and regaining my independence once again."

Lucy added: "It has been a privilege to work with Diana towards her therapy goals alongside the entire multidisciplinary team on the Rutson ward, and I wish her all the best for the future."



Diana Scott-Brown with the team who looked after her in Rutson ward

"I thought I was dead – but a stranger saved my life"

A man who feared he was dying in a remote place has praised a stranger who is now a friend for saving his life.

Earl Parker, 79, was on a solo bike ride in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, when he made a quick stop to admire the breathtaking view of the Dales.

Here, he struck up a conversation with a passing farmer, Ashley Hird, the only other person in the vast region.

Within a few minutes, Earl's left arm and leg suddenly became weak and he collapsed onto the road. The farmer, without hesitation, helped Earl into his vehicle and drove him to the local GP in Hawes at around 5pm.

During the journey, Earl struggled to pick up his phone while lying in the back seat. He said: "I thought I was dead – I thought I was going to die."

During the drive, Ashley used Earl's phone to ring 999. Following this, an air ambulance was immediately dispatched, and the Skipton resident was airlifted to the emergency department at James Cook.

Following a CT scan, the medical teams discovered that Earl had suffered an ischaemic stroke, which, if not treated immediately can lead to permanent, severe brain damage or death.

The stroke team quickly performed thrombolysis on Earl within 13 minutes. This urgent clot-busting treatment helped restore blood flow to his brain.

Earl was moved to the stroke unit for observation and discharged after two days.

According to consultant George Thomas, if Earl had not received the treatment within the four-and-a-half-hour period, he could have experienced some life-changing consequences.

As he continues to recover from his stroke, the former joiner is keen on raising awareness about stroke symptoms.

Earl said: "The entire incident was scary, and I felt like something explosive was happening in my body. But thanks to the care provided by the expert medical teams, I couldn't believe I was able to go home so quickly."

Dr Thomas said: "We are extremely grateful to those who helped Mr Parker reach the hospital quickly, including the Yorkshire Air Ambulance service, enabling him to receive thrombolysis in time. The entire period, which includes from NHS 999 being contacted to Earl being treated, took only one hour – which was vital. Earl's case highlights the importance of the phrase 'time is brain', represented by the 'T' in FAST."

"The NHS and the kind farmer saved my life," added Earl.



Ashley Hird and Earl Parker (left to right)

Check for signs of a stroke

The main symptoms of a stroke can happen suddenly. They may include:

Face weakness – one side of your face may droop (fall) and it might be hard to smile

Arm weakness – you may not be able to fully lift both arms and keep them there because of weakness or numbness in 1 arm

Speech problems – you may slur your words or sound confused

The easiest way to remember these symptoms is the word FAST. This stands for: face, arms, speech and time to call 999.



Earl Parker with the team who looked after him in James Cook

Care bags support patients beyond treatment

Patients with a learning disability attending the emergency departments at James Cook and University Hospital of North Tees are now benefiting from care bags designed to help reduce anxiety and distress during their visit.

The initiative aims to support those who may find busy urgent and emergency care settings stressful or overwhelming.

Each care bag contains a mix of comfort objects such as fidget items, noise-cancelling earphones, eye masks, sensory chew bracelets, colouring pencils, visual aids, sensory-friendly items and information resources.

The initiative has also been extended to include patients who are admitted to wards.

According to the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, patients with a learning disability are more likely to attend the emergency department and attend more frequently than the general population due to complex, co-occurring health conditions.

University Hospitals Tees' learning disability teams understood that improving the patient experience for people with learning disabilities would lead to better outcomes.

Since the bags' introduction, the learning disability teams have received positive feedback from carers and patients at both hospitals.

Patients have shared how they have found the care bags helpful and useful, whilst carers have applauded how they have supported patients during a difficult period for them.

The teams believe that the initiative has supported patient communication while also giving a better experience.

Moreover, it has also supported the hospital's ED staff in providing care to patients with a learning disability or autism, to feel more relaxed and calmer in an often-stressful environment.

Specialist nurse for learning disability, Elizabeth Dixon, said: "We know patients with a learning disability or autism struggle in our busy emergency department. Our goal is to improve their experience by offering a care bag when they access our emergency departments."

Gemma Crooks, nurse advisor for adult safeguarding and learning disability, added: "Patients with learning disabilities often face much higher levels of anxiety during an unexpected hospital visit. By providing immediate comfort items like noise-cancelling earphones and sensory items, we are actively reducing that distress and making healthcare more accessible."

If any patient with a learning disability or a carer requires a care bag, please ask a staff member for further information.



The team at the University Hospital of North Tees



The learning disability team at The James Cook

Staff health and wellbeing festival gets bigger and better

University Hospitals Tees teamed up with local organisations across our community to champion the health and wellbeing of our workforce.

Staff were able to access support, advice and wellbeing resources at the annual health and wellbeing festival, which welcomed a wide range of local charities, support groups and businesses.

The marketplace event was held at University Hospital of North Tees, James Cook, University Hospital of Hartlepool and Friarage.

Interactive stands offered everything from financial and legal guidance and suicide prevention initiatives, alongside practical benefits such as vehicle health checks and cinema discounts.

Internal health support services and networks were also on hand to empower staff to better support their own health and wellbeing and that of their patients.

Rachael Metcalf, chief people officer, said: "Our annual festival is a dedicated space designed entirely to support our incredible healthcare staff and their families.

"By bringing local organisations and private companies together under one roof, we provide a convenient, one-stop shop for vital financial advice, wellbeing support, and exclusive offers for our staff to ensure they can easily access the care and guidance they deserve."

Marie Weedall, healthcare assistant in post anaesthetic care, said: "Alongside my clinical role, I am also the wellbeing link nurse for our department. I attended the festival to gather useful information and resources to share with my colleagues."

Steven Yull, people experience lead, added: "It's been great to see the variety of people attending and the wide range of internal services and external companies attending, with a wide range of ways they can help. It's also really great to see the festival getting bigger and being held across our other hospital sites."

One of the companies supporting the festival was Everyone Active.



Chief strategy officer Matt Neligan and company secretary Jackie White at the James Cook festival with the medical psychology training and consultation team

Jamie Brown, sales manager at Everyone Active in Middlesbrough, said: "We are proud to come together with University Hospitals Tees to promote fitness, health and wellbeing within our community. We love being invited back to the health and wellbeing festival because we believe fitness brings people together and helps create a stronger, happier community for everyone."



The health and wellbeing festival at the University Hospital of North Tees

Making a difference together

"We will do all we can to improve the health of our community and the opportunities to access our services".

This was the key message from healthcare teams across the Tees Valley as they came together to show their commitment to improving the health of its population and reducing the healthcare inequalities people face.

The Improving Population Health and Healthcare Inequalities in the University Hospitals Tees Population event, hosted by University Hospitals Tees, brought together NHS organisations, local authority partners, academics and public health.

The day included the launch of the organisation's new population health and healthcare inequalities strategy.

Speaking at the event, Stacey Hunter, chief executive of University Hospitals Tees, said the organisation was committed to supporting its communities in being healthy and being able to access the best quality care when needed through working with local partners.

Professor Esther Mireku, public health consultant, said: "Improving population health and reducing healthcare inequalities is one of the most important challenges facing health and care services today.

"The conference was our chance to bring together experts from across healthcare, share learning and strengthen our commitment to improving outcomes for our local people.

"The launch of our strategy marks an important step forward, but the real success will come from the partnerships and actions that follow."

Diane Addei, national director of the healthcare inequalities improvement programme at NHS England joined the event. She spoke to staff from a range of services, including the waiting well team who help people become fitter for their surgery and the prospect programme team who arrange work placements for people to boost job opportunities.

Dr Addei said: "It was inspiring to see the level of commitment across Teesside to improving population health and reducing inequalities. The challenges faced by our communities are complex and cannot be solved by any one organisation alone, which is why partnership working is so important.

"By working together and focusing on the needs of underserved communities, we can make meaningful progress towards achieving fairer health outcomes for everyone."

During the afternoon, delegates took part in a series of workshops showcasing successful initiatives from across University Hospitals Tees.

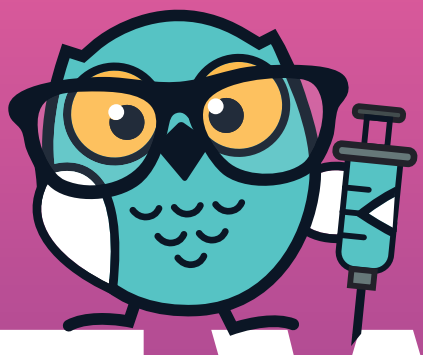
This included work focused on lung cancer screening, reducing inequalities in maternity care, improving outpatient access, supporting children and young people from deprived backgrounds, health literacy and poverty proofing.

The event concluded with a shared call to action, with partners committing to continue working together to address the wider factors influencing health and wellbeing and to ensure everyone has equitable access to high-quality healthcare services.



Dr Addei (second, left) with members of the waiting well team at University Hospitals Tees

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South Tees Hospitals staff

North Tees and Hartlepool staff

HERE TO HELP



Choosing the right place for urgent health issues

People across Teesside and North Yorkshire are being reminded to choose the right NHS service for their needs in the event of an urgent non-life threatening issue.

The urgent treatment centres at the University Hospital of Hartlepool and Friarage provide care for a wide range of minor injuries and illnesses, helping many patients receive treatment quickly and closer to home.

Both are able to perform X-rays for suspected fractures during daytime hours.

The centres treat issues including:

- Minor cuts and wounds
- Sprains and strains
- Minor burns and scalds
- Minor fractures
- Bites and stings
- Minor illnesses and infections



The urgent treatment team at Friarage Hospital in Northallerton

For life threatening issues including suspected heart attacks or strokes, breathing difficulties or major bleeding, emergency care is available at other locations, including in emergency departments at The James Cook University Hospital and University Hospital of North Tees.

Nicola Grieves, head of nursing at University Hospitals Tees, runs the services. She said: "Our urgent treatment centres provide excellent care for people with minor injuries and illnesses and are an important part of the services we offer locally.

"But they are not here for patients who need emergency care. For patients experiencing a serious or life-threatening condition, emergency care is available at James Cook University Hospital and University Hospital of North Tees. By choosing the right service, patients can access the most appropriate care as quickly as possible and help us ensure all services are run safely."

Patients are advised to contact 111.nhs.uk or phone 111 for advice about which service is right for them.



The urgent treatment team at the University Hospital of Hartlepool

Research team celebrates study milestone

More than 1,000 babies born at The James Cook University Hospital have taken part in a groundbreaking research study testing newborns for rare genetic conditions.

By testing for more than 200 rare genetic conditions, the Generation Study could help babies access life-changing treatment sooner.

A participating baby's genome is sequenced shortly after birth using a small blood sample, usually taken from the umbilical cord, with parental consent.

This tests for a range of childhood-onset genetic conditions where early diagnosis and treatment can make a significant difference.

It is not just at James Cook where the study has proved popular. Teams across University Hospitals Tees have seen interest from families, with a high uptake at University Hospital of North Tees too.

Among the families taking part was Zana Sellars from Middlesbrough who enrolled her baby, Remi, in the Generation Study shortly after she was born.

Remi's genome was analysed for several conditions, including cystic fibrosis, Barth syndrome and severe combined immunodeficiency.

If a condition is suspected, the results are returned to the parents by a specialist before further diagnostic tests are offered.



Zana Sellars, baby Remi and the research team at James Cook University Hospital



University Hospital of North Tees research team

When asked why she wanted her newborn to take part, Zana's answer was simple: "It's important for future generations."

She added: "Research is important. Although it might not identify something for your own family, it has the potential to help someone you know."

Tracy Ruddick, obstetrics and gynaecology research nurse, said: “Reaching such a significant recruitment milestone at James Cook is an incredible achievement and a testament to the dedication, teamwork and commitment of everyone involved.

“The Generation Study is incredibly important as it aims to build a better understanding of how genetics influence children's health and development. It can help to identify conditions sooner, potentially allowing children to receive support or treatment earlier"

Sharon Gowans, research midwife, added: "I want to thank all our midwives and maternity teams for their continued support and commitment to delivering this important study.

"I'd also like to say a huge thank you to all the parents who have chosen to take part so far."

Mortuary team member first to complete new specialist qualification

A mortuary administrative assistant based at James Cook has become the first within University Hospitals Tees to complete a new specialist qualification.

Lee Tunley, who joined the mortuary team in 2023, has successfully achieved the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) Level 2 Certificate in Mortuary Support for Mortuary Assistants, after completing a nine-month course that will support his future career development within mortuary services.

Lee, 38, from Middlesbrough, initially began his career as a care assistant and later a senior care assistant during the COVID-19 pandemic, before deciding to shift his career direction.

Lee believes the new qualification has expanded his overall ability to support colleagues and families.

Lee said: "My background in care has definitely given me a head start and helps me to work with patients and their families with empathy. But the course has given me a better understanding of the practical side of working within the mortuary service.

"It means I can support my team more practically and effectively and be there for families when needed. It has also reinforced my knowledge, so I know that what we're doing is right and maintains high standards of care."

"It means I can support my team more practically and effectively and be there for families when needed."

The qualification, delivered through the North Tees Training Centre, covers essential areas including health and safety, infection control, and the regulatory requirements set by the Human Tissue Authority (HTA).

Looking ahead, Lee is now exploring further training to become an anatomical pathology technologist (APT), allowing him to take on a more hands-on role supporting post-mortem examinations and patient care.

Lee continued: "Within the mortuary service you can see some very sad cases, but also stories of incredible resilience which can be massively life affirming. It's a privilege to be able to support patients and families at such an important time in their lives.

"I've always felt comfortable with discussing end of life care and find my role both challenging and rewarding, so further advancing my career within this field feels like a natural progression.

"My managers have been supportive when undertaking the Level 2 course and have already provided further course information so that I can explore my possible route into a career as an APT."



Mortuary administrative assistant, Lee Tunley

James Cook awarded £2.7 million to lead major UK study

A group of researchers and clinicians have been awarded £2.7 million to lead a major national study aimed at improving care for patients living with ureteric obstruction.

The Academic Centre for Surgery (ACeS) based at James Cook will lead the study alongside researchers from the University of York, University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust and Cardiff and Vale University Health Board.

Funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), the Stents In Ureteric Stricture (SInUS) randomised controlled trial will compare two types of stents used to treat blockages in the ureter. It is set to be the largest urology study taking place in the UK.

The SInUS trial, will open to recruitment in February 2027 and will run over a 24-month period involving at least 17 NHS trusts across the UK.

"This is a brilliant opportunity and has the potential to make a significant difference in our patients' lives."

A ureteral obstruction is a blockage in one or both of the tubes (ureters) that carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder and can lead to serious kidney damage. It often requires emergency treatment using a temporary polymeric short-term stent (PSS). While effective, these stents typically need to be replaced every three to six months under anaesthetic, which can be uncomfortable for patients.

The SInUS trial will investigate whether an alternative segmental intra-ureteric stent (SIS) is a better option for patients. Unlike traditional stents, SIS devices can remain in place for more than a year and do not sit in the bladder, potentially reducing stent-related symptoms, hospital visits and the need for repeat procedures.

The trial will recruit 334 patients who are already undergoing stent treatment and are due to have a replacement stent fitted. The trial will be measuring symptoms, quality of life, complications and cost-effectiveness of the alternative procedure.

Mr Chandrasekharan Badrakumar, consultant urologist and chief investigator for the study, said: "This study is not just about understanding how to best manage the disease, but about better understanding the patient's experience with ureteric stents. It's about being able to improve their care and to ultimately help both clinicians and patients to make informed decisions around choosing the best ureteric stent for them – to help them to live better and longer.

"This is a brilliant opportunity and has the potential to make a significant difference in our patients' lives, who can spend less time in hospital and more time living their lives."



Nurse consultant in urology Jon Broughton and consultant urologist Mr Chandrasekharan Badrakumar (left to right)



Chief nursing officer. Emma Nunez presenting an award to the specialist weight management service



Deputy chief nurse, Lindsay Garcia with Shelley Cassidy and Katie Metcalfe

Nursing, midwifery and AHP hero

Outstanding nursing, midwifery and allied health professional colleagues from across University Hospitals Tees have been recognised for the exceptional care, compassion and dedication they show every day.

The Heart of Tees conference and celebration awards brought staff together to celebrate achievements across our professions, with colleagues honoured through nominations from patients and fellow team members.

More than 400 nominations were received for a diverse range of award categories.

Emma Nunez, chief nursing officer, said: "It was a true privilege to attend the University Hospitals Tees Heart of Tees conference and celebration awards.

"Congratulations to all our nominees, and a heartfelt thank you to our nursing, midwifery, and AHP colleagues across University Hospitals Tees. Every day, you go above and beyond to deliver compassionate, high-quality care, both on the wards and out in the community.

"Today was a wonderful chance to celebrate the innovation and excellence driving patient care across the entire Tees Valley and North Yorkshire."

Personalised cancer care prehabilitation lead, Chloé McMurray received the collaboration across boundaries award.

She was recognised for designing, implementing and delivering the OPTIMISE cancer prehabilitation service for patients across South Tees which aims to improve response and reaction to cancer treatment.

Her work connects departments across University Hospitals Tees with local community groups including Active North Yorkshire, Boro Runners and Middlesbrough FC Foundation to provide patients with comprehensive physical, nutritional, psychological and mental wellbeing support before treatment.

Care and compassion

A patient who lost over 11 stone in one-year, paid tribute to the specialist weight management team for their compassionate support. The service took home the team of the year award.



Group chief allied health professional Alan McDonald with the Martha's Rule task and finish group



Amanda Trees with Alan McDonald



Chief midwifery officer for England, Kate Brintworth with Georgia Payne and Zoe Booth



Kate Brintworth with Tracy Pickersgill

es honoured at prestigious event

The patient nomination said: "The care, attention and advice provided by the team is incredible.

"They have helped me build life-long changes and I'm now super healthy and lighter. I couldn't have done it without them."

The Heart of Tees celebration awards invites patients, staff and visitors to nominate an individual or team who has made a meaningful difference through compassionate care, leadership, innovation or teamwork.

Exceptional passion

Specialist bereavement midwife, Tracy Pickersgill, received the excellence in patient-centred care award for her exceptional passion and dedication to helping patients and their families. Recently, she supported tribal women in India to help establish a perinatal mental health and maternity bereavement unit.

The digital and innovation award went to the Martha's Rule task and finish group.

The team led by deputy chief nurse, Lindsay Garcia was recognised for transforming patient safety by embedding patient and family voices into clinical decision-making through the NHS's first dual automated digital pathway.

Amongst the other winners on the day were 'empowering' paediatric clinical educators Shelley Cassidy and Katie Metcalfe who picked up the education and mentorship award, 'courageous' level 6 podiatry apprentice, Daniel Mitchell who received the rising star award and 'proactive' advanced practice physiotherapist Amanda Trees who collected the research and evidence-based practice award.

Finally, the leader of the year award went to lead nurse for palliative and end of life care, Zoe Booth, and Georgia Payne from the adult speech and language therapy and dietetic service.

Zoe was recognised for establishing three palliative care networks, proactively collaborating with community services and playing a pivotal role in the reopening of beds at Butterwick Hospice, expanding choice for patients wishing to be cared for.

Whilst Georgia was commended by her team for being 'deeply committed to developing and championing others' and being 'an excellent and admired leader'.



Daniel Mitchell with Lindsay Garcia



Emma Nunez with Chloé McMurray

Terry shares prostate cancer story to encourage others to get checked

Terry Bytheway from Coulby Newham received his diagnosis eight and a half years ago after first experiencing symptoms.

Terry, 76, said: "Like a lot of men, I found out too late."

After noticing blood in his semen he went to see his GP and was reffered to James Cook just before Christmas.

He said: "When I first went into the clinic, they carried out a rectal examination, which a lot of men are frightened of. I was sent for a biopsy the very next day, so I didn't have much time to dwell on what might be wrong. It's quite an invasive procedure, but it's a necessary evil. The biopsy showed that eight out of ten samples were cancerous.

Terry then spent an anxious Christmas – where he "pretended" to his family nothing was wrong.

He added: "Between Christmas and New Year, I had an MRI scan and bone scan. That's when I was told the cancer had spread to my bones, including my left hip and the base of my skull. I was told it was incurable.

"Cancer has actually given me a better life. Because of the treatments I've received, I've been given a second chance."

"The consultant said, 'We can't cure it, but we have treatments that can keep you alive for years.' I had prepared myself for that possibility and knew I had to be ready to face it."

After starting treatments of hormone therapy and chemotherapy, Terry's PSA reading – a measure of the amount of protein produced by the prostate – had dropped from 32 to 0.2.

He said: "My biggest ally was positivity. I knew my body, I understood what was happening, and that gave me a sense of control. I even gave my cancer a name, Colin. I knew he was going to be with me for life, so I wanted to keep him miserable. Naming him gave me another level of control."

Terry is now sharing his story to help other men.

Around 64,000 men are diagnosed with prostate cancer every year – and for thousands of these men it is already at an advanced stage.

Terry now runs the North East Prostate Cancer Group – which he set up – and gives talks and attends events to encourage men to get checked.

He said: "Cancer has actually given me a better life. Because of the treatments I've received, I've been given a second chance.

"I've had a better time after my diagnosis than before it. It changed my outlook completely."



Terry Bytheway

"Social prescribing has provided a lifeline for me"

A North East man who suffered mental health issues for years has praised a social prescribing service for providing a lifeline to him.

Ian Duncan, 62, was referred to James Cook's cardiology unit by his GP after experiencing chest pains in June 2025.

During his medical assessment, he was informed that he showed signs of a historic heart attack, which caused concern to Ian, as he was also battling years of deteriorating mental health.

He was then referred to the cardiology unit's social prescribing service, which was established following the success of social prescribers in primary care models nationally and their role in linking people to their community.

As part of this, Ian was seen by social prescriber Jane Cousins to offer him guidance and support whilst signposting to further services that would improve his mental health.

Ian said: "My mental health problems have always been a case of ignoring them and hoping they would go away. I was functioning outwardly as a 'normal' person but was mentally exhausted and suffering, what I think was anxiety and OCD."

After considering Ian's history, Jane provided him with vital, non-medical support tailored to his individual wellbeing goals.

This included connecting him with local community networks, introducing him to a mental health support worker and a referral to Everyone Active – where he has started attending the gym and swimming.

Jane said: "It was a pleasure to be part of Ian's journey with social prescribing, and I am so glad that my link to support services has impacted Ian positively, where others have not been successful in the past."



Ian Duncan

"If it hadn't been for the service and Jane, I would probably have carried on trying to deal with things myself and getting nowhere."

Ian, who is regularly working out and now feels better equipped to deal with his mental health problems, added: "Please don't ignore medical and mental health concerns as I did. If it hadn't been for the service and Jane, I would probably have carried on trying to deal with things myself and getting nowhere. The service has been a lifeline for me and long may it continue for the benefit of others."

Michelle Stamp, consultant in public health, said: "Social prescribing focuses on what matters to the patient and empowers them to manage the social, economic and environmental factors that may be driving ill health.

"Since the service launched in June 2025 in cardiology, early evaluation in the first year is already starting to demonstrate positive outcomes for patients, whilst bridging the gap between health and care and the voluntary and community sector and shifting care into the community."

NMAHP team honoured with prestigious recognition

The non-medical e-job planning team has received the AHP Compliance Award at the Patchwork Workforce Awards in recognition of achieving the highest compliance rate for e-job plan sign-off.

Across South Tees, there are approximately 1,600 job plans managed through the e-job planning platform and over the three years since its implementation, the team has consistently outperformed other organisations, maintaining an exceptional sign-off rate.

This year, the team reached an 88% completion rate at the start of the finalisation period, with a projected increase to 96% by September 2026.

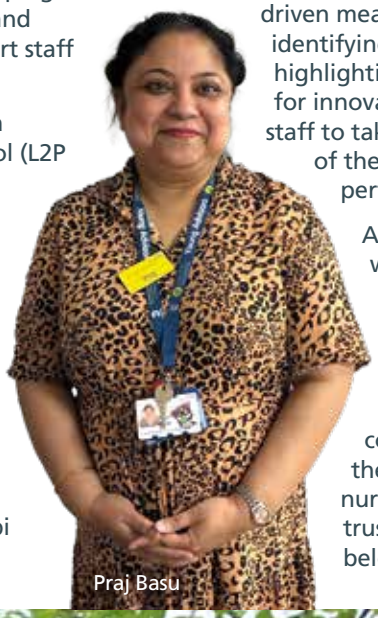
The team is responsible for introducing and embedding electronic job planning across the non-medical workforce, including AHPs, specialist nurses, and advanced practitioners.

Initially led by Praj Basu alongside workforce leads Alison Kerr and Debi McKeown, with support from Karl Rowley, the team successfully implemented e-job planning as a new way of working, developing webinars, workshops, and drop-in clinics to support staff through the transition.

They have introduced a digital job planning tool (L2P Patchwork Health) and worked closely with the team to achieving Level of Attainment 1 within the first year. This was to have 90% of colleagues in scope on the job planning system.

The current team comprising Lucy Smyth, Alison Kerr, Debi McKeown, and Joanne Currigan, continues to support staff, improve workforce planning, and ensure job planning is effectively embedded across services.

This success reflects the ongoing, strategic use of e-job planning as a tool for improvement and transformation. The platform has driven meaningful change by identifying gaps in practice, highlighting opportunities for innovation, and enabling staff to take greater ownership of their productivity and performance.



Praj Basu

Alison Kerr, AHP workforce strategic lead and therapeutic radiographer, said: "This award demonstrates the dedication and collaboration between the AHP and specialist nursing teams across the trust. This award truly belongs to everyone."



The non-medical e-job planning team

"Impressed would be an understatement"

For anyone who struggles to leave their home without support, at-home health services can be a lifeline.

This is something that Derek Brown, who cares for his wife Margaret, knows only too well.

Specsavers is committed to ensuring that everyone has access to essential eye-health and hearing care – but also understands that it's not always easy for people like Margaret, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease, to attend in-store appointments.

That's why, for the past ten years, Specsavers Home Visits has provided comprehensive NHS-funded eye tests to anyone who's unable to visit a store unaccompanied. It's also started to provide free at-home hearing services in selected locations in the UK.

Derek called on the Specsavers Home Visits service when Margaret needed a routine eye test and it was too challenging to get to a store. He was blown away by the expert care that was delivered during the visit and the difference the new glasses made to his wife.

Although Margaret wasn't able to respond to the questions of the optician and their assistant, during the visit, they adapted their approach so they could prescribe the reading glasses that have expanded her world.

"If I was to say I was amazed, that would be an understatement," says Derek. "What was so significant for me as a full-time carer was that the Specsavers experts were punctual, quiet-speaking and patient, reassuring Margaret with everything they did. The level of care expressed towards her was incredible."

Derek, from Northallerton in North Yorkshire, has been the primary carer for Margaret, since her diagnosis with



Alzheimer's in early 2018. After she spent four weeks in hospital in 2022, Margaret's condition deteriorated, and she has since been confined to a hospital bed in the couple's living room, and a hoist to access a wheelchair. With multiple other health challenges, caring for Margaret is complex – but after 25 years of love and marriage Derek has risen to the challenge. As well as taking care of her everyday needs, he's been able to improve her quality of life thanks to Specsavers at-home service.

Following her at-home eye test, the optician suggested Margaret tried some reading glasses to help her enjoy looking at family photos.

Derek was unsure how she would adapt to wearing glasses but seeing her smile while looking at old family pictures told him everything he needed to know.

"If anyone is in any doubt about inviting Specsavers into their home, all I can say is: simply try it," Derek says. "You won't regret it for a second."

Derek now fights for better support and recognition for carers nationwide, and has launched a website (www.dementiaguidance.co.uk) dedicated to helping carers like him across the UK. He's keen to ensure they have all the information they need – including the option of getting a comprehensive at-home eye test from Specsavers.

Why Choose Specsavers Home Visits?

- **Convenience:** Our experts come directly to you.
- **Personalised Care:** Visits are tailored to the individual's needs, with specialist equipment to ensure comfort and accuracy.
- **Peace of Mind:** Your loved one will receive the same kind of high-quality care as they would expect in-store.



Expert eye and hearing care tailored to your needs

For those eligible, our mobile experts will provide a comprehensive NHS-funded eye test from the comfort of your own home, with all the same care and thoroughness as you would receive in-store. Specsavers has now also started to roll out free at-home hearing services across the UK. To find out what locations this service is available in visit our website.

Our eye care and hearing services are tailored to each person and their needs. They are designed to provide eye care and hearing services that are as individual as they are and can be adapted to meet their changing circumstances and comfort levels.

Specsavers

To see if you or your loved one are eligible, call 0800 0890144 or visit specsavers.co.uk/home-visits

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