



Celebrating the History of Community Hospitals

The Community Hospitals Association (CHA) is celebrating its 50-year history. The Association was formed to promote the contribution of small local hospitals and to support staff and communities in these predominantly rural and often isolated areas.

The first cottage hospital was created nearly 160 years ago. The creation of cottage hospitals is an incredible tale. The first cottage hospital was Cranleigh hospital in 1859 and within 30 years there were 300 cottage hospitals. It is hard to imagine the health care landscape being changed so dramatically in such a short period of time.



Cranleigh Cottage Hospital

Numbers of cottage hospitals continue to grow, and in particular to commemorate national events such as the Royal Jubilee or the First World War. Hence there are a number of hospitals built as War Memorials.

The CHA has been fortunate to have a collection of local books and booklets on the history of community hospitals, and we are pleased to share some of these during our 50 years celebrations. They deserve attention, as they set out the community effort to create cottage and community hospitals, recount the social and clinical developments over the years and pay tribute to those concerned.

Particular tales are memorable. Such as the community that purchased X Ray equipment for their cottage hospital - two years before electricity was connected to the town. That was optimistic! Another was the declaration that the management board of the hospital was distinctive as women were members – an exceptional arrangement at the time and worthy of note. Often the publications feature the role that the community hospitals had during wartime.

Support for cottage and community hospitals recorded in these historical accounts was very impressive. Fundraising ventures recounted were extraordinary. Events such as creating a line of pennies, holding carnivals, having competitions (X-ray man in Rye was an unusual one!) and major social events. Local people also gave regular donations such as linen and produce. The generosity of local benefactors is well recorded, as is the donations from legacies.

Skegness Hospital benefited by Mr Butlins organising their carnivals. These examples illustrate the talent and resources locally. Each recorded history is a gem, capturing facets of the community such as public spirit, generosity, public health issues, social issues of the day, medical and nurse training and much more.



Almost all community hospitals have a Hospital League of Friends, who continue to support their local hospitals in a variety of ways.



Southwold Community Hospital

Whilst the cottage hospitals started off with simple facilities for operations and beds, they expanded their services and facilities considerably to include maternity, children's services, diagnostics, clinics and much more. The publications recount the many extensions of buildings and services over the years, and set out the work and funding that went into achieving these improvements.

Clearly the transfer of cottage hospitals into the NHS was a significant change, and many met this with the decision to create a League of Hospital Friends so that the voluntary support could continue. The records show that the management committees of cottage hospitals wanted to hand their hospital into the NHS in good order and that this was a matter of some pride.

Cottage hospitals subsequently became known as GP Hospitals, and then eventually as community hospitals. The concept of the community hospital was developed in Oxford in the 1970s, and Wallingford Hospital was seen as a good example of this, integrating GP surgeries with the hospital and offering a holistic and intermediate level of care. This concept has continued to develop.

I have been privileged to visit many community hospitals over the past 30 years. Very often those talking about their local hospital will talk about the context and

history of the hospital as an important factor in understanding the role of the hospital service today.

Community hospitals continue to evolve and change. It has been said that the community hospital is as distinctive as the community it serves. The flexibility and resilience of community hospitals has been shown over the years, as they continue to provide health and care for generations of local people.

The CHA would like to continue to build up a unique library of publications, photos and artefacts concerning cottage and community hospitals. We would be very pleased to receive any contributions that help us to understand these unique institutions and their role and status in their communities. They have been described as “*part of the social fabric*” of our town, a “*service you can trust*,” “*we know all the staff*,” and “*like family*.” A key message is the sense of ownership felt by local residents, expressed as: “*this is our hospital*.”



Display of Historical Photos and Instruments in Tewkesbury Community Hospital

For the CHA 50th Anniversary we want to celebrate the contribution that cottage and community hospitals have made to the health and wellbeing of our rural communities, and to share their unique history.

We are indebted to Aneurin Bevan, the creator of the NHS and supported of local hospitals. We continue to hold the values that underpin the NHS very dearly.

Dr Helen Tucker
President of the Community Hospitals Association