

**Community Hospitals Association
Annual General Meeting
Presidents Report
Dr Helen Tucker
2024**

August 2024





Reflections from Dr Helen Tucker Outgoing President of the Community Hospitals Association

It is a pleasure to reflect on my 40 years of being involved with the CHA. I continue to be impressed and inspired by the contribution that community hospitals make to the health and wellbeing of their local communities. It has been a privilege to be part of an organisation that dedicates itself to promoting the value of community hospitals and making sure that they are well represented in the planning management and development of local health care. The CHA has achieved so much in its 55-year history and I have been delighted to be a part of this.

I became interested in the CHA when I became manager of a community hospital in Berkshire. I had not previously heard of community hospitals, and was immediately impressed by the natural team working of GPs, nurses, social workers, physios and many others were working together to meet the needs of their patients. I was so inspired by this service that I decided I wanted to know if this model was replicated elsewhere, so I sent a survey to all community hospitals in the UK. Responses were immediate and emotional. Clearly there was much to learn about these small hospitals, and much to do to make sure they were valued and protected. I was invited to join the CHA when my research was published by the Kings Fund in 1987, and I was thrilled to join the Association.

That was 40 years ago and I have valued being part of an organisation that is focused on promoting community hospitals, helping to improve care for patients, supporting staff and working with communities. I have made many friends during this time and enjoyed a shared passion for the value of local hospitals.

The CHA was set up by visionary GPs who wanted to spread the word about this way of working by creating a network to support staff and communities. In particular the late Dr Meryck Emrys Roberts as Founding President and the late Dr Sandy Cavenagh who was Chairman then President. They worked to increase an understanding of community hospitals at a national level and shared their knowledge generously. In the 1970s Sandy embarked on a national tour of community hospitals in a motorhome and collected invaluable data and well as sharing a unique insight into what it was like working in a community hospital. This was an impressive mission! Sandy left all of his records and published papers to the CHA. Dr Roberts devoted his time to researching and writing, leaving a lasting legacy through his book "The Cottage Hospitals, 1859- 1990: Arrival Survival and Revival." It was a privilege to work alongside them both. They had such generosity of spirit and they were so committed to their patients and their communities as well as having the vision across the UK.

Dr Andrew Crowther succeeded them as President having been a crucial member of the CHA committee for many years, and who has played a significant role of steering the CHA. We owe a huge debt of gratitude for all that Andrew and his wife Jane contributed to the work of the committee and conferences.

One of the highlights of my time in the CHA has been the Innovations and Best Practice Awards Programme. The dedication, creativity, passion and pride of staff and those involved in these models of best practice is inspiring. It has been wonderful to share these ideas across the CHA network, and recognise achievements. This programme has been running for nearly 25 years, and nearly 200 awards have been given, many of which were celebrated at our annual conferences.

The CHA has contributed significantly to research and this is remarkable given that the committee is made up of volunteers, most of whom are busy practitioners working in their own community hospitals. The study from the University of Birmingham on the Value of Community Hospitals, carried out with CHA involvement and support gives the evidence of how passionately local communities feel about their local hospital.

The CHA has many alliances over the years including Leagues of Friends, the previous Scottish Association of Community Hospitals, the Academy of NHS Fabstuff and the NHS Benchmarking Network which has enriched our understanding and enhanced our work.

The CHA has had support from the Health Foundation/ Q Community such as to carry out a study on the role of community hospitals during COVID-19. This study meant we could hear first hand from staff about their experiences, share lessons across our network and celebrate many achievements. We have a Special Interest Group within the Q Community with a growing network, and activities such as regular online discussion groups.

The CHA committee are always available to give advice and support to communities, Leagues of Friends and staff, and through our ever-growing network we can usually connect with people who can help. We know of those communities over the years who have campaigned to keep and develop their services and we are concerned about the loss of local accessible healthcare in some areas. In other areas, there is a recognition of the role of community hospitals matched with investment and development. It is a mixed picture, and the CHA continues to make the case for a national strategy on community hospitals. The CHA continues to connect with members through the website, newsletters and conferences. We have all had to learn new skills in communications such as social media and website management, but it means that we are reaching more people than ever before.

The CHA has extended links internationally, making valuable relationships across the world including Italy, Sweden, Japan, and Uganda. I know that these will be developed further, as the similarities in our model leads to mutually beneficial knowledge exchange.

All of us on the committee have played a role in the work of the CHA, and donated time and energy to what we all feel is an important cause. I have enjoyed being part of this team, and am impressed with the dedication and commitment of all involved. The CHA has benefited particularly from the work of our Development Manager, Eleanor Murphy. Eleanor has helped us translate our vision into action, and continues to enable us to extend our networks and further support our members.

In the future I plan to spend more time researching and writing. The CHA has a unique library of documents, books, reports and data and I hope to help make some of this reference material more widely accessible. So I will continue with my interest and passion for community hospitals.

I will be sad to step down as President of the CHA after 8 years as I have enjoyed the role enormously. However I am delighted to be handing over to Dr David Seamark, who will bring a new energy and perspective to the role and contribute his extensive clinical and community knowledge and experience. This is an exciting time for the CHA, and I wish the Association well.