

Celebrating a partnership for the benefit of patients

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In today's NHS culture, commissioners are increasingly looking to the third sector for innovation and excellence in healthcare delivery. Opportunities for organisations within this sector to form fruitful and lasting partnerships have also grown.

The Restoration of Appearance and Function Trust (RAFT) is a medical research charity with a programme of translational research to develop wound healing technologies. These technologies are vitally important to maintaining or improving the wellbeing of patients living with a range of wound types.

The Lindsay Leg Club Foundation (LLCF) is a registered charity supporting patients with leg ulcers and related problems through a social model of care. It represents over 25 community-based centres in the UK alone, which are staffed by volunteers and nurses, and are attended by several hundred people every week.

This shared interest of RAFT and LLCF in finding ways to improve wound treatment have allowed the two organisations to work closely together. RAFT and LLCF have collaborated on patient advocacy programmes focused on improving technologies, treatment, delivery of care, and quality of life within a significant, but often under-recognised, area of health care.

The main objective of the partnership is to empower and improve the quality of life of people with wounds by:

- Undertaking practical research that is relevant to wound healing
- Seeking relevant personal experiences (patient stories) of people with wounds that influence research strategy
- Exploring joint fund-raising opportunities to make a significant impact in this area of care.

Both RAFT and LLCF have made considerable progress over recent years, transforming the level of awareness of their activities in the government, and NHS circles, and with the public. The collaborative relationship of the two charities is continually evolving, but both

have and will remain patient-focused in all their processes, aims, objectives, and values.

RAFT AND LLCF CELEBRATE THEIR SECOND ANNIVERSARY

Over the past 2 years, a programme to involve Leg Club members (patients) directly in the development of new, enhanced treatments and care pathways has been established. This will include a standing forum of members, the development of educational information aimed at members, and a dedicated web portal.

RAFT was keen to share their innovations with LLCF and the Leg Club Industry Partners (LCIP). Two open days at the RAFT laboratories in Northwood (Middlesex) were arranged for LLCF trustees and LCIP members. The RAFT team was delighted to give their guests the opportunity to tour the laboratories, meet the team, ask plenty of questions – apparently scientists thrive on questions – and have a closer inspection of the latest research being undertaken on their innovative bionic limb project and Smart Matrix™ skin scaffold.

LLCF reciprocated by inviting members of the RAFT team to attend its past two annual conferences. The workshops on the first day of the most recent conference were produced in



Above. Lord Howe, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Quality at the Department of Health (centre), with speakers Ferrial Syed (left) and Mary-Rose Fawkes (right) at the 2012 Lindsay Leg Club Foundation and Restoration of Appearance and Function Trust reception at the House of Commons.

Below. The Restoration of Appearance and Function Trust and the Lindsay Leg Club Foundation came together in November 2012 for their first joint reception at the House of Commons.



partnership with the LCIP members, and were led by expert healthcare professionals and Leg Club members. According to RAFT, it was a special privilege for their team to talk to patients directly, gaining insight into how living with a leg ulcer impacts their lives. The team had no idea of the day-to-day challenges and social stigma attached to leg ulceration, such as immobility, wound leakage, and malodour. Talking to patients is key to both organisations, as they are the reason for their existence.

In November 2012, RAFT and LLCF held their first joint event – a celebration reception at the House of Commons. Both charities were privileged to hold this event in such auspicious surroundings and showcased their work to supporters, Members of Parliament, the House of Lords, and the media. Guests heard speeches from both organisations' Chief Executives, Professor Mike Clarke (LLCF) and Leonor Stjepic (RAFT), as well as from patrons and volunteers.

Mary-Rose Fawkes, a member, volunteer, and LLCF patron spoke about living with a leg ulcer, and recalled the benefits of attending her local Leg Club. Another patient, Ferrial Syed, bravely

shared her story too. She was badly burned as a child and now, 20 years on, still needs surgery on a regular basis. If the research of RAFT had been available to Ferrial when she and her family were in desperate need, her life might have been quite different. But she is not looking back, only forward, and is an excellent RAFT ambassador.

The RAFT–LLCF partnership was also recognised at the 2012 *British Journal of Nursing* awards, where they received third prize for their submission "Wound healing research from grass roots – two charities: one goal".

As to the future, a continued, transparent cooperation is critical for the research and development of new, enhanced treatments and care pathways that ultimately lead to improved patient outcomes. Importantly, frameworks have been agreed that ensure LLCF, clinicians and RAFT address all legal, moral, and accountability issues. Overall, this third sector partnership could form an effective basis for improving wound care.

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In conclusion, both organisations have made considerable progress by transforming the level of awareness of their activities among government and NHS circles, and with the public at large. Their joint advocacy programme is also engaging plastic surgeons, general surgeons, and other specialist clinicians with an interest in wound care and tissue viability.

As part of the third sector, RAFT and LLCF firmly believe that their partnership has the potential to improve the quality of treatment of several chronic conditions in the community. **WUK**