Leg Club 2021: what's been happening?

As the world was taken over by the pandemic at the beginning of 2020, the Best Foot Forward Leg Club was forced to close suddenly. Who would have thought that access to nursing treatment would be limited? But looking back this was just the beginning of things to come and the challenges to accessing services.

'The emphasis of the Leg Club Model is to provide a therapeutic, non-medical, clinical environment in which social interaction, participation and peer support can ease loneliness, engender friendship and develop a sense of community — this in turn leads to concordance with leg ulcer management techniques.' (Lindsay, 2008)

Our thriving Leg Club with 40 plus members attending each week for active ulcer care, Well Leg support and social activities closed. As a nursing team, it left us feeling empty.

'The ethos of care, social support, friendship and medical treatment is what makes this form of nursing care so unique and successful.' (Lindsay, 2020)

The motivation to support more vulnerable members was a great team focus. Administrative staff and nurses worked hard to make alternative arrangements for our members.

All active ulcers were allocated to practice nurses based in a new COVID-safe nursing hub at a GP surgery site. Joint working between our district nurses and our enhanced care team supported those who required home visits. Members who had availed themselves of the Well Leg service were phoned by the practice nurse and offered weekly, bimonthly or monthly telephone support, which was then bolstered with support for the members from the volunteers. The National Wound Care Strategy Programme (NWCSP) recognises the importance of promoting self-care and shared decision making (NWCSP, 2020). Not knowing how long the pandemic restrictions would be in place, it rapidly became apparent that we were building a list of overdue hosiery and Doppler assessments; to manage this, we created a waiting list, so that we had some accuracy to work with when able.

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Best Foot Forward Club back in action!

As ease of lockdown began after the first wave, the team started to explore how we could safely reopen in October 2020 shortly after our 5th anniversary. In order to re-open, we needed to prioritise active ulcers while continuing to support our Well Leg service remotely, in keeping with the Leg Club Model. As suggested by Health Education England in 2016, working to bring healthcare closer to home kept us focused to be proactive and creative to get things moving. A formal risk assessment was conducted for the venue, as well as for staff and volunteers. Volunteers were approached to see if, risk assessment permitting, they would be willing to support reopening. Naturally, there were some nerves, but there was also considerable enthusiasm to reopen. For all of us, it felt like we were making some progress back to 'normality.'

Our venue, Upton Social Club, agreed to allowing us back, supported by their manager and cleaning team. The risk assessment established a new working layout; on paper, it felt rigid and too 'formal' compared with the Leg Club environment we had once known, with one-way systems and restricted numbers accessing the building at one time. However, we had to give it a go, erring on the side of caution with all plans.

We based this on the rule of six, creating bubbles for our members. Some volunteers were unable to return following risk assessment but understood the importance of working within the Government's COVID guidance. The apprehension of staff, members and volunteers was palpable, and initially, there was a subdued atmosphere compared to the usual hustle, bustle and fun of our Leg Club! Our strict adherence to infection control and prevention and risk assessment quickly reassured our members,

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and, although no social element, teas or raffles were possible, our bubbles began to interact with each other from their chairs, and we began to hear familiar laughter. Some members only left the house for Leg Club each week and commented on the impact that returning to Leg Club had on their overall wellbeing. Whether a volunteer or member of the nursing team, we all recognised the privileged position we were in and the trust our members placed in us.

The lack of background noise was a change for all of us, so we introduced some background music, which helped us all relax. We then asked members for their music requests and created a Leg Club 'playlist'. This generated laughter and conversation about who selected which tune and what memories were associated with these tunes. Brenda, a volunteer, loved Beethoven, while one of our members, Keith, loved Queen. We all enjoyed listening to our members' stories.

Creating a video for the international vWIN Foundation vein week was a highlight for members and reminded us of the value of the chair exercise sessions we used to have. Members also participated in new dressing trials for service industry supporters and completed the related paperwork, which again stimulated conversation and gave them a sense of supporting Leg Clubs and the wider community.

As lockdown has eased further, we have started to offer refreshments again. To help with infection control and reduction of weekly plastic waste, we have our own reusable Leg Club mugs available for a donation; these were a hit in the first week! The volunteer team has reintroduced the weekly 'golden ticket' and continue to plan the reintroduction of the monthly raffle, and there are even thoughts of a monthly hairdresser. As pointed out by Mechen (2019):

'It is this enhanced social component that makes a positive difference to patients, breaking the cycle of poor compliance to treatment and low healing.'

The nursing team is planning a slow reintroduction of armchair exercises and podiatry. Striving to drive services

Social activities restarting at Best Foot Forward following the easing of restrictions

Staff and members of Best Foot Forward Leg Club at the reopening during the pandemic

forward and helping our future medical and nursing team grow is vital (NHS England, 2019), and we are supporting medical, pre-registration nursing students and nursing associates with educational placement time.

We are also looking forward to welcoming back our housebound patients and being able to use the community bus transport; the social support for these members will be invaluable. Reintroducing our joint working with our district nursing team in a timely manner is important, as their services have remained open but over-stretched.

The Leg Club at the Adam Practice is not only sought as important by those who physically work there but is valued by the whole wider team. This was reflected in our 2021 Jurassic challenge walk, where 30 members of staff completed a circular walk from Weymouth and around Portland. All funds raised will be going to the Lindsay Leg Club foundation and Best Foot Forward charity. The fresh air also provided time to think about those members and volunteers who we have sadly lost during the last year. Having raised over £3000, we are looking to utilise some of these funds to enhance our Well Leg service; we also asked members to feedback their ideas for improvements. Here are some of their comments:

'The new layout of Leg Club has meant that I have enjoyed chatting to people that I have not spoken with before.'

'I look forward to Leg Club each week. I have felt very safe, wearing my mask, and the nurses have theirs on too, and are very thorough with cleaning.'

'I have bought a new Best Foot Forward mug and have enjoyed chatting with friends since refreshments have started.'

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