

The Buzz Bulletin



September 2021
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Newsletter of the
North Hampshire Prostate
Cancer Support Group

Welcome to the Buzz Bulletin

Back to the bowls club for our September meeting!

After 17 months of Covid lockdowns and Zoom meetings, we are at last able to return to the Basingstoke Loddon Vale Indoor Bowls Club for regular face-to-face monthly meetings starting on Thursday 30th September at 2.00 pm.

We have however been informed that there will be no tea and biscuits available at the September meeting due to restricted catering facilities at the club. (and in case you are wondering, you can't bring your own because of their insurance conditions) We are however working with the Bowls Club to ensure that tea and biscuits will be available at subsequent meetings.

As this will be the first time that many of us have met for well over a year, and there is a lot of catching up to do, we will not have a speaker in September so we will have plenty of time to chat amongst ourselves.



...and we need your views and opinions on the future of the NHPCSG.



This is also a great opportunity to find out what you want from the NHPCSG. Do we simply carry on as before Covid? Would you like a complete change of format? How about evening meetings or days out. Would you like a Christmas meal?

With only about a quarter of our previous membership taking part in our Zoom monthly meetings, your committee really do need you to come to our September meeting at the bowls club and let us know how you would like the group to go forward, so please make every effort to join us (but if you can't make it, please email your views to Allan our secretary).

If you have not been to the Loddon Vale Bowls Club before, it is located on Basingstoke's Leisure Park near Milestones Museum, Post Code RG22 6PG. There is plenty of free parking and the Park and Ride bus service stops in the park. The meeting is free entry.

I look forward to seeing you all there.

Martin

Success at Basingstoke's Festival of Transport

After a rainy Saturday, Sunday 22nd August dawned bright and warm as Martin, his wife Virginia and Chris Goss set up the NHPCSG awareness stand in Basingstoke's War Memorial Park.

This was our first public event since Covid lockdown and the first major local outdoor event that was organised by Basingstoke Rotary Club with support from Basingstoke and Deane Council. It was also our first opportunity to display our new feather flags and tabards.

Members of the public were soon flooding into the park and we later heard that the car parks were full with nearly 15,000 people enjoying a great day out. We had a steady stream of people coming past our stand and we handed out nearly 350 Prostate Cancer UK leaflets as well as our own NHPCSG flyers. We had really interesting conversations with many people, some clearly deeply affected by a recent prostate cancer diagnosis of a loved one, and we really felt that we were able to provide useful information and support with all the thanks we received.

Allan, our secretary, was interviewed live on the event public address system and we received visits from the Rotary Club President, Pink Place/Blue Space, our local Cancer Services Partnership chair person as well as Stephanie, our exercise group instructor, who all complimented us on our stand.

We could not have run our stand without the help of other NHPCSG members who as well as Chris Goss included Brian Biles, Tony Chuter, David Janetta and Richard Holt, so thanks to you all, and especially to Keith Bunker for co-ordinating the arrangements with our members and the Rotary Club.

We are now hoping to take our awareness stand to Basingstoke's shopping malls and to some other events later in the year so watch this space for details.

Martin



Photo by Martin Budd



Photo courtesy of Allan Roper



August group meeting talk on Immunotherapy

Jessica Finch, a senior research nurse from the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre, gave us a fascinating talk on immunotherapy. She started by explaining that our body's immune system normally seeks out defective cells and usually destroys them, stopping them reproducing. However, cancer cells can throw up a "cloak of invisibility" that prevents our immune system from recognising them and so letting cancer cells multiply. Immunotherapy aims to remove this "cloak of invisibility" so that our natural immune systems have a better chance of destroying the cancer cells.

Whilst immunotherapy is currently being used successfully to treat breast, head, neck and skin cancers, it is still in the trial stage for its use for advanced prostate cancer where it has spread outside the prostate. Drug trials usually run through three phases. Phase 1 is purely to test that the drug is safe to use and does not measure its effectiveness. Phase 2 tests how effective the drug is in treating the condition and determining the optimum dose. Phase 3 then compares the effectiveness of the new drug with existing treatments.

At the Mount Vernon Cancer Center there are several immunotherapy trials currently in progress, both as a stand-alone medicine and also in conjunction with other treatments such as hormone therapy. With current advanced prostate cancer treatment paths, once hormone treatment has become less effective, the next step is usually chemotherapy, but this can only be given for short periods because of the adverse effects it has on the body over the longer term. It is hoped that immunotherapy could be used for much longer periods, possibly without the need for any chemotherapy and its adverse side effects.

Breast and prostate cancers are both driven by hormones, oestrogen in women and testosterone in men, so some of the research into treatments for these similar cancers could benefit from similar drugs. If the prostate cancer immunotherapy trials prove to be successful, it is hoped that NHS approval for their use will be easier to obtain due to their current use for breast and other cancers. You may also have heard about BRACA 1 and 2 genes and how when faulty, (gene mutation) can lead to breast and ovarian cancer in women. It has now been discovered that faulty BRACA genes can lead to prostate cancer and Mount Vernon is also conducting trials on Park Inhibitor drugs that can help repair the faulty cells. This is being conducted separately from their Immunotherapy trials.

Our members followed up on Jessica's excellent talk with several questions including when could immunotherapy become generally available for treating prostate cancer? -- Unfortunately, there are no defined timescales yet as even if the trials are successful, NICE/NHS approval can take many months, sometime years.

Our members are usually under the care of Basingstoke, Winchester or Guildford hospitals which are not directly involved in these immunotherapy trials, but Jessica explained that if members have advanced metastatic prostate cancer and would like to be considered for inclusion in The Mount Vernon Cancer Centre trials, they should ask their own local oncologist.

Martin