

NEWSLETTER

Lockdown Issue 3

Although the reported number of new cases and losses due to the pandemic appear to be going in the right direction, we are clearly not out of the woods yet. Follow the guidelines, exercise personal judgement / common sense and there may come a time, hopefully in the not too distant future, when we will be in a position to resume branch activities.

There has been much discussion whether in the meantime we could hold meetings via “Zoom”. If this is of interest to you and there is sufficient demand then it is perhaps worth exploring?

Please e-mail me with your thoughts.

Norman

The following article is a series of questions, asked by members and answered by head office in relation to how they have responded to the challenges of the suspension of branch activities:

As we are unable to have meetings at the moment, why do we still need to pay a capitation fee?

As a charity, we have to maintain a certain level of financial security in order to enable us to exist. We are very keen to continue to both support existing branches and develop new branches and increase our membership once this Coronavirus is over. We have to have a base and a presence across the country (and in Scotland and Wales) to support us to do this. A bigger membership also means we can advocate for retired people and also seek out more and better national benefits for our members.

Could a branch decide to pay the capitation fee for 2020-2021 for members out of its accounts?

Absolutely. We are very aware that most branches have more than sufficient funds within their own branch accounts to pay the reduced capitation fee for members should they so wish. This would be a decision for individual committees.

What if members have already paid the full subscription for the year 2020-2021?

The money that is due in at the moment is for last year (2019-2020), which is the full £20. Some branches have already started collecting for this year (2020-2021) and that will be for the discounted £10. What to do with the remaining £10 is for branch committees to decide – either to refund individual members or put that £10 into existing branch accounts.

Some of our members pay by cash so what is the advice there?

In the current situation, handling of cash or cheques is not advised. We would recommend that arrangements are made for bank transfers to happen. The Central Office will also accept bank transfers. If this is not possible then the Government advice is that people handling cash or cheques should wear single use gloves.

By when would we have to pay the capitation fee as it will be due in January 2021 and we may not have met by then?

It was previously agreed that this year's capitation fee (2020-2021) would be paid in year and a date of 23 January 2021 was publicised. If it is not possible to collect fees by the end of January, please contact Central Office or your local development officer. In the meantime, it would be sensible to make arrangements for your members to pay the membership fee preferably by bank transfer.

Why didn't the trustees apply for government financial support instead of collecting capitation fees from members?

Our chief executive John Rostill has tried several avenues for gaining extra financial support but so far these have been unsuccessful. We also looked at the opportunities that were set up specifically to respond to Covid19. We already get money from the Government and a loan is not appropriate. We will continue to apply for grants and work with other agencies such as NHS England, the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament for extra sources of funding as well as bidding for grants and lotteries. However, we would still need to collect some form of capitation fee from members to ensure the long term viability of your NHS Retirement Fellowship.

When will meetings start again?

At the moment we cannot offer any information or advice on this. We are following emerging Government guidance closely and will of course advise branch committees in response. However, the final decision whether to hold a meeting or not rests with the individual branch committee. In part, they will be guided by individual venues who will determine when they are prepared to admit groups again and in what circumstances. Individual branches should consider how many people socially distanced you would be able to get into your current location and make plans accordingly. You may find you can have meetings with some of your members but not everyone and might therefore decide to have two meetings to accommodate members. There may also be the opportunity for smaller groups to meet in locations such as pubs or cafes – particularly important relevant for committees.

What if the branch is unable to meet for the rest of the financial year?

We sincerely hope that the rules relax sufficiently to enable group meetings in some form to take place before the end of March 2021. However, it is a very real concern that this may not be able to happen and branches are right to consider it as a possibility. We are looking at what advice we can provide about branches having meetings via Zoom and have set up a system for free online talks.

Why was the conference cancelled when it is not due to take place for another five months yet?

We don't believe that large gatherings will be allowed or if hotels will be completely open by then. Rather than keeping our members hanging on, we took the sensible decision to cancel now. We also don't believe that the majority of our members (many of whom are classed as vulnerable under the Coronavirus definitions) would want to travel or attend a large gathering. We also don't think we would be able to recapture the atmosphere and socialising etc of recent conferences knowing that most of our members attend for friendship, fellowship and fun.

Could we have a conference in this financial year?

We could but this is extremely unlikely.

Should branches have their AGMs?

It is preferable that branches have some form of AGM and we are aware of some branches that have already arranged virtual meetings online. It is possible to issue an agenda with the decisions required identified and allowing members to vote by post or online. There is no requirement during these unprecedented times for a branch to have a physical AGM. If you need further advice, please contact Central Office.

Do accounts have to be approved by a branch AGM before being sent to Central Office?

We know the difficulties in arranging AGMs in these circumstances therefore we will accept a draft set of accounts that has not yet been submitted to the AGM. We will also accept accounts that have not been independently assessed.

Are all the staff still working?

Up until June 1, all our staff are working from home and are continuing to fulfil their obligations. Inevitably because a number of tasks that would normally be undertaken can't be done because of travelling and contact with the NHS, the hours that some staff are working varies. We anticipate a gradual return to the office for the Dorset team with just one person in the office at any one time as of June 1 if the national requirements laid out by the Prime Minister continue to be met. The trustees are grateful to the staff – who are all part time – for working their hardest to deliver a service to our members in difficult circumstances.

Why don't we mothball the NHS Retirement Fellowship?

This is not possible because we are a charity and all of the efforts of the trustees and the staff is in ensuring the long term viability of the NHS Retirement Fellowship so that it can not only survive the Coronavirus lockdown but thrive in a post Coronavirus world. We can completely appreciate the frustrations of members during this time and we are working as hard as we can to ensure the future of the organisation.

Why didn't you furlough all/ some of the staff to reduce costs and take advantage of Government support?

Our staff work one to two days a week so the impact of furloughing some of the staff would not be huge. We are in constant communication with our staff and their personal circumstances in respect of their own health and wellbeing and the responsibilities they have at home are a matter of great importance to the trustees. We continue to monitor the situation and would discuss with individual members of staff if a furlough situation seemed to be the best course of action.

The above views are not necessarily those of the Cardiff Branch, but food for thought!!!

ONLINE TALKS

If you haven't already, I would recommend registering for the on line talks by going to www.mirthy.co.uk/NHSRF They are held fortnightly at 11:00am.

Apparently 564 members registered for the last talk, titled "My Poisons" – a humorous look at 19th century medicine.

The next scheduled talks are:

July	14 th	Travels with a Penguin to Antarctica
July	28 th	History & Mystery of Hypnosis
August	11 th	A Tibetan Journey

NOTICE

Cottages.com/Hoseasons have decided to streamline their business and they are no longer able to offer NHSRF members 10% discount. However you will still be able to get the discount if you are a member of NHS Discounts. To join visit www.healthservicediscounts.com FREE to join.

If you would like to contribute to the next issue (there will no doubt be a need for more newsletters) please e-mail me with any newsworthy items that may be of interest to other members.

Norman

NHSRF Photography Competition



Above; Maureen Salmon's *Late Afternoon in the Dales* was awarded "Highly Commended" in the 'Seasonal Colours 2019-2020' Photography Competition and below; *Spring Watch* by Jill Evans received an "Honourable Mention".

