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# Fellowship, fun and friendship

The NHS Retirement Fellowship brings together people who have worked or volunteered in health and social care – and it's flourishing, says **Sally Bundock**

**R**EACHING RETIREMENT is indeed an achievement in itself. So, if you are reading this and it applies to you – well done...

It's perhaps a time to take stock of your life and make the very best of those all-important years when, without the daily work routine, there is greater opportunity to make choices on how to spend your time and with whom. It's a chance to perhaps have more time with family, to enjoy 'old' friendships and a time also to build new.

We are fortunate today that there are a variety of activities and groups for retirees to become involved in. For those who have worked or volunteered in the health and social care sector, there is the lovely organisation that I work

for, the NHS Retirement Fellowship, which was founded back in 1978 as a social, leisure, educational and welfare organisation at that time for NHS staff. Today the fellowship comprises a much wider membership from the health and social care sector, including partners. We have moved with the times, widening both our membership and our range of activities and benefits for members.

Our membership, both postal and

**"I'm both proud and pleased  
how members have supported  
each other during the  
coronavirus crisis"**

**NHS Retirement Fellowship chief  
executive John Rostill OBE**

branch, is spread across England, Scotland and Wales. Most members belong to one of our 130 branches. While all branches are part of our charity and work in harmony with our Central Office, they each have their own special identity and programme of activities agreed and organised by the branch members. There are monthly get-togethers with speakers and refreshments, organised walks, theatre visits, and day trips – with some branches even organising their own holidays. For members who enjoy working as a team, there is the opportunity to be part of a branch committee or even to be a Regional Representative for part of the country and hence take part in the fellowship's National Council.

**Whittington Branch at the  
Walthamstow Wetlands**





As well as branch activities there are get-togethers organised across the whole fellowship. Unfortunately, our AGM/conference two-day event planned for Manchester had to be cancelled in 2020 because of Covid-19 but it is hoped we will be able to go ahead with this in autumn. We also have Member Day events, golf and photography competitions and the popular fellowship holidays. Our M25 Group organises events to which all those within the area are invited. Our website and our fellowship newsletter keep members up to date with all that is new.

Fellowship is perhaps an old-fashioned word. One definition I found on the web reads “a friendly association, especially with people who share one’s interests”. Within our charity we take it to mean somewhat more than that. As well as all the activities to be enjoyed with like-minded folk, most of our

**“We’ve moved with the times, widening both our membership and our range of activities and benefits for members”**

branches have a nominated member who is a welfare officer. Their role comprises sending birthday cards and sometimes ‘get well soon’ cards. They keep a friendly eye on branch members and offer a helping hand where necessary. This might involve visiting someone at home or in hospital.

The fellowship also has its own Benevolent Fund which members can apply to for help. All applications are handled in strictest confidence. Belonging to the fellowship is like being part of a large family.

As for everyone in these difficult times, fellowship members found their usual activities and outings were forfeit to Covid-19. Members, however, rose to the occasion and as chief executive officer John Rostill OBE said: “I am both proud and pleased how members have supported each other during the coronavirus crisis.”

During the pandemic, members have been supported by a monthly news sheet from the CEO and regional newsletters have been produced containing news, quizzes and jokes around the three countries.



Cambridge Branch on Cremer Pier

For example, in the South East members have been receiving fortnightly newsletters since the first lockdown in March. Branches have been keeping in contact with their members by phone, text, WhatsApp, email and Zoom. Many branches have been holding committee and even branch meetings with speakers on Zoom. Members have enjoyed the challenge of learning something new which has helped them keep in touch with each other.

Many branches have continued to produce and circulate their own newsletters. Where it has been possible within government guidelines, groups of members have met outside, observing social distancing. The numbers signing up to our Facebook page continue to climb, with members and staff posting daily.

One initiative that has captured the interest of a large number of members is the fortnightly live talks provided by Mirthy ([www.mirthy.co.uk](http://www.mirthy.co.uk)) Each session starts with live chat (optional) between participants. Then, promptly at 11am, our host, Alex, welcomes everyone and introduces the speaker for the day. We have enjoyed a wide range of topics by some excellent speakers. After the talk participants then have the opportunity to ask questions of the speaker, and there is more live chat for members. The events are enjoyed by many and there is the opportunity to watch the talk again within a seven-day window.

As one member, Hilary D’Ettorre, said in her branch newsletter: “I have enjoyed immensely the talks from Mirthy. It really does make you feel

like you are in touch with the real world! The speakers and topics have been really good. I have particularly enjoyed the talks that feature places where I have previously been on holiday as it made me feel like I was there again. At least for the duration of the talk I was on holiday... I enjoy the feature whereby you can talk to others linked in for the talk by corresponding on the chat section.”

The fellowship today is about friendship, support, trying something new and, above all, having fun. Membership is just one way of enhancing your retirement. If you have worked or volunteered in health or social care, we would love to hear from you, so why not give us a try?

■ Sally Bundock is development officer of the South East England/East Anglia NHS Retirement Fellowship.

## Find out more

■ For more information on the NHS Retirement Fellowship, see the website: ([www.nhsrf.org.uk](http://www.nhsrf.org.uk)) or contact Debbie or Sherry at the Central Office, tel 01305 361317.

**NHS**  
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