

The newsletter of Queen Victoria Hospital NHS Foundation Trust



Discovering that you have cancer can be devastating, even more so during a global pandemic. With much of the NHS treating patients with COVID-19, Queen Victoria Hospital (QVH) was asked to take on a special role – becoming a surgical cancer centre, providing appropriate and timely treatment for patients with high-risk cancers (breast, head and neck, and skin).

Cancer is not a disease that waits

Working with hospitals from across Sussex, Surrey and Kent, our staff were able to build on our regionally and nationally recognised expertise, and agree the best approach for each patient to provide them with the timely treatment they needed. For some patients like Mr Plethero, that meant travelling, in his case 40 miles, to receive surgery to remove cancer in his jaw. He said: "Cancer is not a disease that waits for you and having the surgery meant everything."

Since the start of the pandemic we have treated more than 2,300 patients with breast cancer, head and neck cancer, or skin cancer, as well as patients already referred to QVH.

Whilst we reduced the number of patients coming onsite to minimise the risk of COVID-19, we continued to support our non-cancer patients too, converting many outpatient appointments to online or telephone consultations (read more on page 2). As we see a significant number of trauma patients with injuries to the eye, hand or face, and burns, referred to us from across the South East, we also found ways of continuing to provide the urgent treatment they needed.

Playing our role in the pandemic

"At a heartbreakingly difficult time you all made me more than whole again and I am forever indebted."

QVH cancer patient

Keeping patients and staff safe and minimising the risk of COVID-19 at the hospital continues to be a priority. COVID testing patients before their surgery, regularly COVID testing staff, wearing a face covering unless exempt, good hand hygiene, social distancing, utilising virtual and telephone consultations, and reducing the number of people in waiting rooms all continue.

So, whilst things may not be back to 'normal', the dedication of all of our staff has not changed. As one of our breast cancer patients said, commenting on her treatment during the pandemic: "At a heartbreakingly difficult time you all made me more than whole again and I am forever indebted."



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Transforming care

Video consultations

We offer an outpatient video consultation appointment service called NHSVideoConsult. You may be asked by a clinician if you would like to use our video consultation service for a new or follow-up outpatient appointment. This is as an alternative to visiting the hospital for a face to face appointment.



Online patient services

Queen Victoria Hospital is offering online outpatient consultations as an alternative to coming to our hospital in person. This enables our patients to have a video consultation or provide information about their condition to one of our specialists securely through our website.

All you need is a PC or device using Google Chrome or Safari. Video consultations require a device with a camera and microphone enabled.

We recommend when using Apple devices to use Safari 12.4 or later. For all other devices use Google Chrome 80 or later, or Microsoft Edge 83 or later, for video consultations or uploading photographs.



Helping our patients attend appointments virtually

Since early in the pandemic, we have been working hard to develop alternative ways to treat and support our patients virtually, where clinically appropriate to do so, without them needing to come to hospital. Online consultations via a computer, smartphone or tablet have become a popular method and around 1,000 of our appointments each month are currently carried out that way, in addition to telephone consultations.

To help make the transition to virtual consultation a bit easier, we have created a dedicated mini website. Housed within our main hospital website, it is a one stop shop, where patients can enter a virtual waiting room before being called through to their appointment, as well as securely upload photos to help with their diagnosis or treatment. There is a test area, staffed for an hour each weekday, to help patients try out their technology well ahead of seeing a clinician. We are continuing to roll out patients being able to book their follow ups before they go, transferring them to a reception team at the end of their consultation if appropriate.

Confirm your appointment by text

In January 2021 we introduced a new two-way text message system to help our patients confirm whether they are able to attend their face to face, virtual or telephone outpatient appointments.

Whilst we have sent text reminders for some time, the new system allows patients to respond with the words CONFIRM, REBOOK, CANCEL, or STOP (to opt out of future messages). The system will help us reduce the number of missed appointments from patients who do not tell us they cannot attend, and also make it easier to rebook.



When we asked our patients what they thought of this new type of appointment, the feedback was positive. Comments included "I was able to have a proper consultation, no different to an actual face to face appointment ... I am not local so the consultation saved 5 hours of driving," and "The appointment felt like I was in a room in the hospital. Doctor was very friendly and understanding."

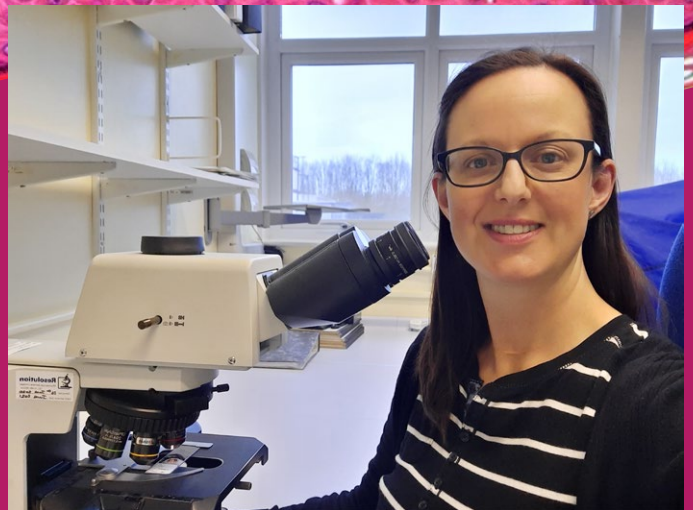
You can find out more at:
<https://onlineservices.qvh.nhs.uk>



Under the microscope

Did you know we have a dedicated team of scientists who examine samples or biopsies of tissues and cells under a microscope? Nestled in a lab in the heart of the hospital, our histopathology team play a vital role in confirming whether a patient has cancer so they can progress to having treatment if needed.

We spoke to two members of the team to find out more...



Fiona Lawson is the laboratory services manager for our histopathology service. With a dream of becoming a vet, Fiona studied for a five-year biomedical science degree in Canada, before moving to the UK and using her skills and love of animals in DNA testing and working out the sex of parrots, emus and ostriches. But it was an advert for a biomedical science job at a hospital that lured her away.

Fiona explains: "I saw a biomedical science job advertised, something you don't tend to see in Canada, and I thought I can do that! I got a job working in cellular pathology for the NHS back in 1995 and haven't looked back since." Moving to different hospitals to expand her experience, Fiona joined QVH as laboratory services manager 15 years ago. With Fiona's expertise, our histopathology lab became the first in the UK to gain the internationally recognised ISO15189 accreditation.

"Biomedical science has changed so much," explains Fiona. "Our speciality is more advanced now as are the diagnostic techniques like molecular testing. Every day is different and it is great to be part of a team and specialism that is evolving."

Suzanne Hatter is an advanced practitioner in histopathology and has been at QVH for three years. "Since I was little I've been interested in looking down a microscope so I was perhaps always destined to do a science degree. Like many people I didn't set out to have a career in biomedical science. After graduating with a degree in biology I became a school lab technician before seeing a trainee histopathology role at a hospital (I had to look up what histopathology was!) and that was 20 years ago now."

Suzanne's role at QVH involves dissecting tissues specimens and following a very skilled and detailed process to enable the samples to be looked at under a microscope for a diagnosis. "I select the relevant parts of the tissues, which are then processed and embedded in wax. Once set, the blocks are cut with a microtome, stained and ready for viewing under a microscope. Each sample is given a unique number that links it to the relevant patient and follows it throughout its journey. As you can imagine there are lots of quality checks too."

"I've always wanted to work within the field of science and I'm driven by wanting to make the best analysis I can for each patient."



QVH Charity

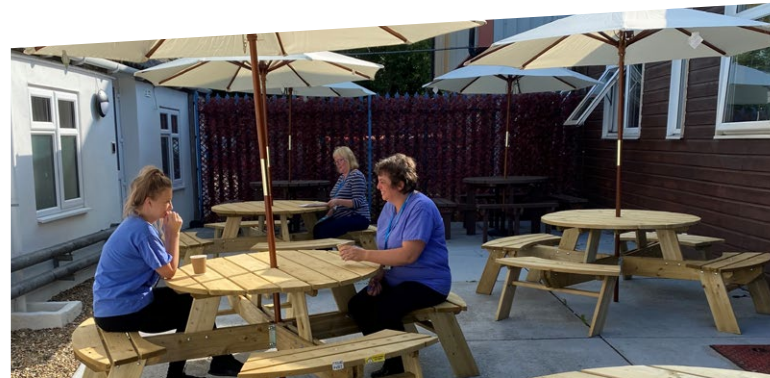


QVH Charity's investment in our hospital

Since 1996, QVH Charity has provided funding for equipment and other improvements that are above and beyond what the NHS funds to help support the life changing care provided at our hospital. Now more than ever, the charity is continuing to invest in initiatives that will make a real difference to our staff and patients.

One project the charity was able to fund was a 'Magic Carpet' sensory unit for some of our youngest patients. It is an interactive resource which projects games and images on the floor that users can play with and control simply by moving on or over the projected image. As going to hospital for a procedure can be traumatic for many children, the Magic Carpet is a welcome, and fun, distraction.

As a way of thanking staff for their work throughout the pandemic, QVH Charity has been able to fund projects including refurbishing a staff room, funding outdoor seating for well-deserved breaks, and providing additional psychological support.



Camilla Slattery, head of fundraising said, "Alongside the funding we have been able to make specific to the pandemic, we have continued to invest in important initiatives like purchasing medical equipment and investing in research, as well as funding staff training. This is a significant increase on what we were able to fund previously.

"Words cannot express our gratitude for the kind messages and donations we have received in the last year. It really has meant so much. We could not support our wonderful hospital without the fundraising efforts of our local and wider community. Every donation helps us make a real difference."



The 'Magic Carpet'



Help make a difference

You can make a donation to QVH Charity in a number of ways:

by post

Please make cheques payable to 'QVH NHS FT Charitable Fund' and send to QVH Charity, Queen Victoria Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Holtye Road, East Grinstead RH19 3DZ.

online

You can make a donation via JustGiving using this link:

<https://www.justgiving.com/qvh-nhs>



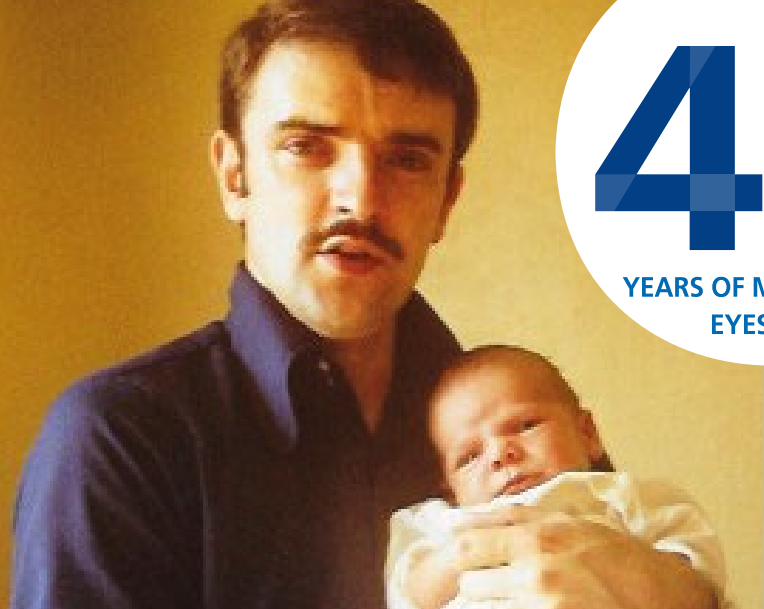
www.supportqvh.org

by phone

Please call the cashier 01342 414416 to make a card payment.

Thank you!

40

YEARS OF MIRACULOUS
EYESIGHT

Celebrating the 40th anniversary of his sight saving surgery



Corneo

When John was referred from his hometown of Derby to our hospital for surgery to save his sight, little did he think that 40 years later he would be contacting us to say thank you.

John explains: "When I was in my late teens I started having problems reading at school but my optician wasn't sure what the problem was. I tried glasses but my vision was changing fast and I was fortunate an optician recognised this as Keratoconus. I was fitted with micro RGP contact lenses but as my condition got worse I was getting regular corneal abrasions and sometimes I'd blink and the lens in the worst eye would just flick out.

"After being seen by a few different opticians and consultants I was eventually referred to **QVH who confirmed I had Keratoconus.** I'd never heard of it before, neither had anyone in the family or friends; there wasn't the same amount of information available as there is now - this was way before the internet!"

Keratoconus is a condition where the normally round dome-shaped clear window of the eye (cornea) progressively thins causing a cone-like bulge to develop. Left untreated, it affects the eye's ability to focus properly and causes poor and blurred vision. It is something that affects more than 1 in every 2,000 people.

At QVH John was treated by internationally renowned expert consultant on corneal grafting, the late Tom Casey. In October 1980, he had a corneal transplant to remove the abnormal part of his cornea and replace it with a donated cornea. John continues: "I remember being in hospital for two weeks and when the bandages were removed several days after the operation, realising I had good vision straight away. The registrar had done such neat stitches the nurse said he should do embroidery!" In February 1982 John went back to QVH to have the stitches removed.

Since then John says he has **"never looked back"**. "I'm now in my 70s and have been retired several years, but that graft allowed me to have a very full family life and active career, both of which would otherwise have been greatly diminished. I worked in the space industry on several satellite programmes including a lot of time working with NASA, so good sight has been crucial.

"Over 40 years later it [the graft] is still giving me 6/5 vision [6/6 being classed as perfect vision] with a mini-scleral contact lens over it. I wear lenses all day long and, when I put them in, I have the daily miracle of sight and I can't thank you enough for that."

Samer Hamada, consultant ophthalmic surgeon and clinical lead of our corneoplastics unit said: "QVH continues to be at the forefront of cornea and eye surface diseases, a legacy that started more than 60 years ago. We are referred and treat patients from across the UK and Europe, and thanks to the refinement of corneal surgeries it is now safer and more effective than ever before.

"John's eye condition (Keratoconus) is now treated using cornea cross-linking which is a minimally invasive procedure to stop or slow its progression. If the condition is very advanced then a partial thickness corneal transplantation can be performed. Recovery is much quicker and in most cases the procedure is carried out as a day case. We are also proud to be one of the very few eye units around the country and the world to perform suture-less corneal transplantation.

"40 years ago, transplanting cornea cells or thin layer of the cornea as thin as 20 microns was a dream! Now it is a reality thanks to the skilled team, advanced technology, and the amazing work at the **QVH Eye Bank** which was established as the first eye bank in the UK in 1952."

Could you give the gift of sight?

At QVH we carry out around 250 cornea transplants a year, but there is a recognised national shortage of people donating their corneas after they die. Your corneas are the part of the body you are most likely to be able to donate – but have you thought about whether you might be a potential donor when you pass away? We would like everyone to have a conversation with their friends and family about their wishes when it comes to donation. We know first-hand that it is a life-changing gift.



Kim's 1 in a million

When Kim's daughter asked her whether she had noticed a mole on her face looked darker than she had remembered, it was the start of a treatment journey that would see her also becoming QVH's milestone one millionth patient since our current health records system began.

Kim, from Kent explains: "I had a mole on my face which to be honest I thought was an age spot. I'd been out in the garden over the summer and had a bit of a healthy glow but hadn't noticed the mole might be changing. My daughter and husband encouraged me to get it checked out so I sent some pictures to my GP who referred me to a specialist.

"Last October I had a biopsy which confirmed I had lentigo maligna, an early form of melanoma cancer, and the mole needed to be removed. Although the specialist thought they'd taken it all, there were a few cells remaining that needed looking at, so they referred me to QVH. I was worried about having more surgery on my face. I'm not one to panic but I didn't really want to have another operation.

"Because of the pandemic, my first consultation with Mr Siva Kumar at QVH was over the computer, a nice but slightly surreal experience! He explained that it was my choice if I wanted further surgery but if there were one or two cells left the cancer could come back. I could ask as many questions as I wanted and it was all reassuring.

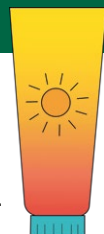
I'd heard about QVH so knew I was in safe hands.

"A couple of days before my surgery I came to the hospital for the first time – for my COVID test. My surgery went well and I returned a week later to have my stitches removed. I was ecstatic to be told I've got the all clear, and although I've had surgery twice on my face, the scar is neat and to me looks better. I've had lots of advice from Mr Kumar and the nurses about looking after my scar and needing to wear factor 50 sun cream from now because of the cancer. I've been so fortunate and can't thank them enough."



Siva Kumar, consultant plastic surgeon and our clinical director for plastics, said: **"Kim did exactly the right thing contacting her GP when she found something that she didn't think was quite right.** Around 15,000 people in the UK are diagnosed with melanoma each year so it's important to seek help because early diagnosis can make it more treatable. Throughout the pandemic we've continued to provide patients like Kim with timely treatment and what better way for us to mark the milestone of treating our one millionth patient than being able to tell someone their cancer has gone."

Worried about skin cancer? Here are our top tips...



- ✓ **Stay in the shade**, especially during midday hours. Wear clothing that covers your arms and legs.
- ✓ **Wear a hat** with a wide brim to shade your face, head, ears, and neck.
- ✓ **Wear sunglasses** that wrap around and block both UVA and UVB rays.
- ✓ **Use sunscreen** with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher, and both UVA and UVB (broad spectrum) protection.
- ✓ **Avoid indoor tanning.**

Get in touch

We'd love to hear your stories about what QVH means to you.

You can contact us via:

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