

## “OUR JOURNEY THROUGH THE MENTAL HEALTH PATHWAY”

FEBRUARY 2020

My name is Lea. I have had 55 years of experience in nursing in Sunderland. I am passionate about care in the NHS. I am sharing the experience of my husband Charles and myself.

Charles was a chef most of his life starting his career as a waiter at the Seaburn Hotel.

Charles commenced his twenty-year merchant navy career on the recommendation of a shipping owner *Alan Black*.

A highlight was embarking on the maiden voyage of a ship built in Sunderland taking him to far off lands. He visited many countries in his career including Papua New Guinea integrating with the indigenous people.

Charles continued his travels in the Territorial Army, proud to serve Her Majesty the Queen. He ended his working life as an auxiliary nurse which he loved. Sadly due to illness he had to retire.

Charles was an avid reader. His general knowledge was excellent; everyone wanted him on their quiz team. Charles had an eclectic taste in music and live theatre and cinema. Charles enjoyed socialising and entertaining. He was a really funny character, always the star of the party.

Charles had numerous medical problems. Since the age of forty-nine he was subject to innumerable admissions to hospital and underwent several operations. He had great confidence in the expertise offered in the N.H.S.

His endurance was phenomenal and he rarely complained. He remained the joker and supporter of others even when he was a patient.

Charles was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2015 after having symptoms for approximately three years. I managed to look after him at home until June 2019 when I recognised that he was getting worse. I arranged a three-day holiday in The Lakes. We packed our suitcases together and then retired to bed. At around twelve o'clock that night I awoke and became aware that our front door was open. Looking outside I could see Charles at the top of the drive running away, dressed only in his pyjamas. Because we live near a river, I contacted the police. The police found him some time afterwards with a large knife in his hand intended for me.

Charles was a danger to himself and to others. He had attacked me a couple of times that week with a chair. Once the police came they took control and he was admitted to hospital. Following Charles's admission he was taken into care at the *Thornbury Nursing Home*. This was a difficult and sad decision. I was able to take him out every day. Staff at the *Thornbury Nursing Home*

informed me that Charles was having difficulty sleeping. He had not slept for weeks. He was becoming irritable, angry and aggressive. The difficulties were happening more in the evening. I was concerned as Charles looked dreadful. I took it upon myself and arranged to get something for Charles from our general practitioner to help Charles to sleep. However the person in charge of the home was not happy with Charles being prescribed medication in-case he fell, so as a result Charles did not receive anything to help him sleep.

I requested that the *Mental Health Nurse* and *Behaviour Support* be contacted and an appointment was booked for the Friday. However on the Sunday before the appointment, I was contacted by the home informing me that they could not control Charles's behaviour. He was distressed, trying to get out of the door, was aggressive towards the staff and they had requested help from the *Crisis Team*.

The *Crisis Team* responded immediately. They contacted me and were very clear as to how the situation would be managed. They maintained contact with me throughout, informing me of the progress and next steps in the management. I was informed that Charles would need to be assessed by a psychiatrist, which may result in him being sectioned.

At this point I became very distressed. I was frightened that he would be taken to Newcastle, as my friend's admission was traumatic. She was handcuffed and taken in a police car.

*The Head of the Crisis Team* re-assured me that this would not happen. They explained that Charles would be transported by a specialist team in an ambulance intended for patients like Charles. Thus I felt re-assured.

The nurse contacted me to ensure that I understood the information I had been given. She demonstrated a very caring attitude, listening to my concerns and giving re-assurance. Gordon informed me that a place had been found for Charles at *Monkwearmouth* and I was very relieved as I had heard of the high standards of care on offer there.

I was informed that Charles was upset and reluctant to be admitted. I advised the team to tell Charles that it would be good for him to go and so Charles complied. I was pleased that I had been consulted with regard to the problem.

The head of the crisis team addressed the legal proceedings surrounding Charles's admission which would be re-enforced with documentation.

It was late at night but I agreed with the team head to bring the documentation to my home. He checked my understanding of the contents of documents, telephone numbers, exact location of Charles's admission and how to access it, and how Charles would be managed. I was informed that I could visit the next day. I felt that I had been supported throughout by the *Crisis Team*. The communication was outstanding.

The environment in *Roker Ward* was warm, welcoming and receptive to my needs. The staff were always accessible and approachable. The staff's attitude to patients was amazing. If there was a difficult patient, the staff responded immediately and efficiently, demonstrating a caring, calming influence with consideration to patient dignity. Their attitude was outstanding.

Charles was allocated his designated named nurse *Ron Cook* who was an absolute professional. Ron was consistent in his approach. He would inform me when he had "days off" and of the name of the co-worker caring for Charles in his absence.

The consultant was available every day to give me information and answer my questions. The consultant was on holiday at the time of Charles's admission.

The registrar conducted the meeting within forty-eight hours of Charles's admission, which was the exact time scale on the written documentation I was given.

I was given a most informative *Welcome Pack* which was invaluable in identifying resources available to Charles and I.

*Charles's Nursing Care Plan* was an individualised and holistic approach.

I was included in aspects of the planning and outcomes discussed and opinions sought. If the named nurse Ron Cook identified that the plan was not being adhered to, then immediate remedial action was taken. There was a substantial amount of support given to the carer. I felt nurtured and included in understanding how Charles was being managed. My needs were acknowledged with empathy and compassion. Communication was excellent. Charles always looked clean and well-cared for.

- *Clare McLaughlin – behaviour support services* – Clare was very professional identifying her role clearly, explaining how she could support Charles.
- *PHYSIOTHERAPY* – was delivered on a daily basis with an encouraging gentle manner.
- *THE ACTIVITIES* were excellent, delivered with fun and enthusiasm. Charles thoroughly enjoyed the sessions and I was invited to join in if I so wished.
- *THE TEAM* approach was evident. Each discipline complimenting the other including the happy domestic staff.

Charles was monitored for intervention and treatment in a slow progressive way. I was always included in the decision making and perception and understanding monitored.

- *THE TEAM* were exemplary, outstanding in care and communication. The improvement in Charles's mental and physical health was amazing.

I was given support to take Charles out to the theatre, beach, cinema etc. which contributed significantly to raising our spirits and making our hearts sing.

Although this service may seem an expensive commodity if a holistic team approach is taken as with the *ROKER UNIT*, it is a vehicle for prevention of the deterioration in both mental and physical health thus reducing the burden on other services.

Mental Health Services does not always get the praise it deserves. Well done Sunderland! The service we received was second to none. We will be forever grateful.

Thank you.....Lea and Charles Craggs.

Acknowledgements: NHS Northumberland, Tyne & Wear

Foundation Trust for producing Welcome Pack – Older people’s Dementia Care In-patient Service.

Key to Success

Communication – Inclusion

Team Approach

Named Nurse.