

# FRIENDS OF CHICHESTER HOSPITALS ARE 75 YEARS YOUNG THIS YEAR!

## Richard Stephens on why there are good reasons to celebrate

Celebrating our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, Friends of Chichester Hospitals is the only charity solely dedicated to supporting Chichester's hospitals. But why is this plural you may ask? Because our support extends not only to St Richard's Hospital but also to the extensive mental health facilities at Graylingwell Park (the Oaklands Centre, the Chichester Centre and Connolly House). We are entirely run by volunteers and award almost all (94%) of our income to support local services, patients and staff, amounting to £432,000 over the last three years. The Friends have grown from a very small organization into a respected local charity that's raised, husbanded and spent many millions of pounds on enhancing the treatment and hospital experience of hundreds of thousands of patients in the Chichester area. Our work is recognized, as these two examples illustrate:



*This is the type of equipment donated by the Friends – a state of the art ophthalmic camera for diagnostic purposes. Photo: Jane Ramage*

- 2016 Best local charity after nomination by *Chichester Observer* readers
- 2019 Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the highest recognition for what we do.

### How we began

Amidst the aftermath of WW2 when our country was striving to build a better society, a Government decision was taken in 1948 to provide healthcare to all citizens, free of charge. This was a revolutionary and exciting move – both idealistic, and challenging. At that time Chichester had two acute hospitals – the Royal West Sussex (opposite Oaklands Park but since converted to apartments) and the 'new' St Richard's Hospital, opened in 1939. It also had one of the largest mental health facilities in England at Graylingwell Hospital with about a thousand long-stay patients. Enthusiasm to assist the new hospital system grew enormously and by 1949 a network of 'Leagues of Friends' began to grow throughout the country, building on the willingness of volunteers to offer practical help.

### The Friends in Chichester

At the beginning Chichester's hospitals had two Leagues of Friends but in 1955 they merged into one and were named the League of Friends of Chichester Hospitals. As patient numbers grew, and new treatments were developed, the Friends began to help significantly with the cost of medical equipment thereby enabling our local hospitals to introduce more up-to-date techniques. By building our resources through fundraising and



*The Friends of Chichester Hospitals celebrate their 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary Photo: Joanne Stephens*

many generous donations and legacies, the Friends have often been the first donors to kickstart fundraising for almost all major projects to modernise St Richard's Hospital. These were usually beyond local NHS budget capability. The Friends have made substantial initial donations to the special appeals for funding beginning in the 1990s. Notable examples are:

- A & E department
- Chichester Treatment Centre
- Donald Wilsons House
- Eye clinic with diagnostic equipment
- Fernhurst Centre for cancer treatment
- MRI and CT scanners

### Support for Graylingwell Hospital

Today, Graylingwell has two modern centres, with fewer patients than in the past. Friends' support includes funding more physical activities, with therapeutic focus on fitness (gym, table tennis and snooker equipment), gardening and artwork. This has extended to appropriate seasonal outings for example to the theatre, local cafes or fishing. These help to build confidence and enable patients to participate in everyday recreational activities in preparation for eventual discharge into the community. The Friends also provide substantial funding for enhanced festive activities at the Chichester Centre, Oaklands, and Connolly House. Christmas can be a difficult time for long-term patients and the Friends aim to support socialisation and the opportunity to participate in enjoyable activities.



*Running the hospital shop is one of the Friends' most significant projects Photo: Richard Stephens*

### Fund raising is an art!

We have no paid fundraisers but are very fortunate to have support from thousands of people who give not just money but their time and talent to support the Friends' work. These events attract attention to our fundraising appeals. Examples vary greatly and include casino nights, jazz lunches and celebration teas. Then there is music. The success of excellent concerts in Chichester Cathedral and local churches owes a great deal to the generosity of musicians and singers who have given their time and talent freely, or for minimal expenses. Thanks are due to Chichester Voices, and to the Friends 'own' Amici Chorus, assembled by a dedicated group of local and London-based musicians and singers. And those many fetes and street collections! These are supported by an army of volunteers who have used their initiative to raise funds independently using sponsored activities and other means. An essential aspect to fund raising has been the continuing financial and practical support from the business community and groups like Rotary, Lions, Masonic charities, Women's Institutes and bowling clubs. Supporters of all types, whether individual fundraisers 'doing their own thing', joining an organised event or a group of friends sharing an activity for a worthwhile local cause, help to make the difference between providing basic amenities like ward televisions, to being able to provide the funding for life-changing diagnostic equipment, which would be unaffordable from local NHS budgets.



*The trolley service is owned and fully run by the Friends. It's a lifeline for patients, especially those staying for longer periods. Photo: Richard Stephens*

### The Friends' Shop and Trolley service

This is the visible face of what the Friends does and it has grown from a tiny cupboard to a welcoming shop with a wealth of choice for everyday items and small treats. Our dedicated

volunteer teams have managed these services over the last 50+ years. They are a major contributor to the Friends' annual income, raising over £60,000 in a typical year. This helps us remember that it's not just the headline-attracting big projects that get attention because the 'little things make a difference' during a hospital stay. This is why the Friends offer trolley services. A ripple of pleasure goes around a ward when a trolley is pushed in with cheerful volunteers helping patients choose a newspaper, card, chocolate bar or some toiletries – and patients have a chance to chat, however briefly, with someone who is like a friendly neighbour calling in to say hello.

Richard Stephens chairs the Friends of Chichester Hospitals.

Readers who want to give their support can become a Friend, a volunteer, make a donation or remember the Friends in their will. For information on these, and more, visit the Friends website at [www.friendsofchichesterhospitals.org.uk](http://www.friendsofchichesterhospitals.org.uk)