Volunteer befrienders making a difference in the community

IT HAS only been going a few months, but Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust’s befriending service is already improving the lives of patients with longstanding illnesses.

The trust, which runs Basingstoke hospital, Royal Hampshire County Hospital in Winchester and Andover War Memorial Hospital, is one of only a 12 in England to receive funding to provide this service, which is being run in conjunction with Hospice UK.

The service sees volunteer befrienders give social companionship to patients who have a chronic or life limiting illness and who might be isolated and lonely.

One of the first volunteers to be allocated a patient was Liz Male, who lives in Andover and has been visiting Rosemary at her home in Winchester for several weeks.

Liz said: “I’m having a great time visiting Rosemary. At the moment we just have a cup of tea together and have a good old chat, but I’m hoping to be able to take Rosemary out a bit as the weather gets better. It would be nice to take her to a garden centre, or into one of the villages, just to get her out of the house for a bit.

“When care workers visit, they have work they need to do, so they do not always get time to sit down and just chat. That’s where we come in.

“I really feel like I am helping and would certainly encourage other people to volunteer. It’s a really worthwhile thing to do.”

Rosemary said: “I’m enjoying Liz’s visits very much. I love having her come to see me and really look forward to it.

“The befriending service is a really good idea and I think there is a big need for it in the Winchester and Andover area. Older people can get lonely, particularly if they have been bereaved, and that is a terrible thing.

“I would encourage other people who are on their own to talk to their doctors and nurses about the scheme and see if they can get themselves signed up.”

Caroline Nash, HHFT’s befriending manager, added: “The feedback we have had so far is really positive. Both patients and volunteers think it is fantastic. The volunteers we have going out are really enjoying it.

“It’s just such a worthwhile thing to do. These people are very lonely, so when volunteers go and see them, it can be a bit like their birthday coming every week because they are looking forward to it.”

Hampshire Hospitals offers the service across the county, with volunteers matched to a patient within their local area.

Befrienders receive relevant training as well as regular and on-going support and help.

Volunteers are asked to commit to visiting for two hours a week. Anyone interested in becoming a Befriender will be invited to an informal interview and the role is subject to references, simple health checks and DBS clearance.

If you are interested in becoming a Befriending volunteer and would like further information, contact
Notes to Editors

1. Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust provides hospital services to a population of approximately 600,000 people in Hampshire and parts of West Berkshire.
2. HHFT has around 5,500 staff and a turnover of £345.6 million a year.
3. HHFT delivers one hospital service across multiple locations including its own hospitals, Andover War Memorial Hospital, Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital and Royal Hampshire County Hospital in Winchester. It also provides outpatient and assessment services from Bordon and Alton community hospitals.
4. As a Foundation Trust, HHFT is accountable to the local community through a system of local ownership with members and elected governors. HHFT has around 18,000 staff and public members. Foundation Trusts are free from central government control and can reinvest any surplus to develop clinical services. They are authorised and regulated by Monitor, an independent regulator.

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