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Communications Department

Royal United Hospital
Combe Park
Bath
BA1 3NG

Tel: 01225 826230 / 821459
Mobile: 07557 756658 (office hours)

ruh-tr.communicationteam@nhs.net
www.ruh.nhs.uk
www.twitter.com/RUHBath

Media Release

RUH sets up new support group for heart failure patients

A new support group set up at the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust is bringing together patients with heart failure to share their experiences of the illness.

The group, which recently held its first meeting, also gives patients the opportunity to ask clinical staff any questions they may have about heart failure and get advice.

Sue Hounsell, 61, from Trowbridge, was one of the patients to attend the first meeting. She said: "The meeting was really good. It's nice to be able to talk to people who know what you're going through and share your experiences with them.

"I really enjoyed the social side too and it's reassuring to know you're not the only one going through this."

Sue, a former gym manager, first noticed her symptoms while at work.

"I've always been an active person, but I'd noticed that when I was moving equipment around at my gym that I was getting out of breath a bit more," she said.

"I couldn't stop work or take any time off as I had such a busy schedule, but I was having to sit down a lot more as I was continuously out of breath. I also had pain in my abdomen which was causing me discomfort and swelling.

"It was when I started having trouble breathing at night, especially when I was laying down, that I knew I had to get checked out.

"I got an emergency appointment with my GP and when he saw me he told me to go straight to the hospital.

“I went straight to the RUH, who were great. The care I received was exceptional - I was immediately taken straight for scans and had a lot of tests done too. It was strange, because I was never in pain at all, it was just the struggle to breathe.”

Sue spent two weeks at the RUH where it was found she had problems with two of her heart valves and also that her heart wasn't pumping blood around the body as effectively as it should.

Sue now takes medicine for her heart failure, which is helping to keep her symptoms under control.

“I still try to do some light exercise and do lots of gardening, which I love, but I can only do it for short periods of time, so it's little and often.

“I'm really keen that people know what symptoms they should be looking out for and to make sure they seek help and advice as early as possible. The earlier heart failure is detected, the sooner you can get the treatment you need.”

This week is heart failure awareness week and the theme is 'Heart failure does not stop us'. It aims to help people recognise the symptoms early, seek treatment, and live empowered lives.

Heart failure means that the heart is unable to pump blood around the body properly. It usually happens because the heart has become too weak or stiff.

Heart failure does not mean your heart has stopped working. It means it needs some support to help it work better. It can occur at any age, but is most common in older people.

Heart failure is a long-term condition that tends to get gradually worse over time. While it cannot usually be cured, the symptoms can often be controlled for many years.

The main symptoms of heart failure are the 'Three Fs':

- **Fighting for breath** - breathlessness after activity or at rest
- **Fatigue** - feeling tired most of the time and finding exercise exhausting
- **Fluid** - swollen ankles and legs

Some people also experience other symptoms, such as a persistent cough, a fast heart rate and dizziness.

If you or someone you know are experiencing persistent or gradually worsening symptoms of heart failure you should see your GP. Tests can then be performed to check how well your heart is working including scans and blood tests.

You can find more information on the NHS website - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/heart-failure/>

There is also lots of support and information, including educational films for patients, on the British Society for Heart Failure website - <https://www.bsh.org.uk/resources-for-patients>

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Notes to Editor:

At the RUH we're proud to put people at the heart of what we do, striving to create an environment where everyone matters. Everyone means the people we care for, the people we work with and the people in our community.

We provide a wide range of services including medicine and surgery, services for women and children, accident and emergency services, and diagnostic and clinical support services.

We also provide specialist services for rheumatology, chronic pain and chronic fatigue syndrome/ME via the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases which we acquired in 2015.

In 2021, we acquired Sulis Hospital Bath, an independent hospital that provides care for both private and NHS patients. This has enabled us to provide more care for NHS patients, as well as continuing to provide private care to those who choose it. Any additional income earned through private care is reinvested in services for the benefit of the people we care for at both Sulis and the RUH.

Our new Dyson Cancer Centre brings together many of the RUH's cancer services under one roof to provide a cancer services hub for over 500,000 people in the South West. The centre includes the RUH's oncology, chemotherapy and radiotherapy services, a 22-bed inpatient ward, a dedicated pharmacy, research team and nuclear medicine and physics teams.

A key feature of the new centre is the Macmillan Wellbeing Hub. The three-storey hub provides a welcoming, non-clinical space designed around the needs of patients and their families. It also includes comfortable accommodation where relatives and loved ones can stay overnight.

We work closely with other health and care organisations as members of the Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board. We strive to improve the health and wellbeing of the people in our community by working together build one of the healthiest places to live and work.

We are rated 'Good' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

For more information about the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust visit: www.ruh.nhs.uk