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## Media Release

### **Making a splash: RUH sessions help stoma patients dive back into life**

Patients living with a stoma are rediscovering their confidence in the water – and taking steps towards bigger life milestones – thanks to supportive swimming sessions run by the Royal United Hospitals (RUH) Bath NHS Foundation Trust.

Although Claire had had a stoma for a decade, she had only been swimming twice since her surgery. This feeling is not unusual. While people living with a stoma can safely go swimming should they wish to, many feel nervous about taking their initial steps back into the water.

A stoma is an opening made during surgery that connects part of the bowel to the surface of the abdomen. This means that stools or urine pass out of the stoma and into a special disposable bag worn on the outside of the body. Stomas can be temporary or permanent, and people have them for many reasons including some types of cancer, bowel diseases, or emergency surgery.

“When you go through life-changing surgery, there are a lot of firsts,” Claire says. “You put off things because it’s different and you don’t know what to expect.”

“Going swimming can be something you feel anxious about. You worry about what might happen if your bag leaks, and people noticing your bag in the changing rooms. It’s very unlikely that anything bad is actually going to happen – you’ve just got that fear beforehand.”

To address these concerns, the RUH’s Stoma Therapy team are running free monthly Water Confidence sessions in the hospital’s outdoor community pool. First introduced in 2025, the sessions have now restarted following a winter break.

These private swim sessions provide a safe and understanding environment to allow patients living with a stoma to build their confidence swimming. The specialist Stoma Therapy nurses are also on hand to offer practical advice and reassurance, including tips on how to make sure stoma bags are secure before getting into the water.

Fiona Rogers, Health Care Support Worker in the Stoma Therapy team, said: “Although the physical benefits of stoma surgery are profound, learning to live with a stoma bag can be emotionally and mentally challenging. We noticed that, following their physical recovery, many patients lacked the confidence to take part in public outdoor activities.

“Swimming is one such activity. Whether it's for the health benefits or just for the enjoyment, getting back in the pool or the sea after stoma surgery can be pretty daunting.

“Our private swimming sessions were set up to demonstrate to patients that, when following their usual stoma care practices, there is no reason that wearing the bag should prevent them from taking part.”

Claire attended the Water Confidence sessions shortly after they were introduced last year. Although she had been swimming since getting her stoma, it was only in private or quiet spaces and with the support of others living with a stoma who could show her the ropes. “Without them I wouldn't have gone.”

She decided to give the Water Confidence sessions a go to help build her confidence swimming independently. “They made me feel, ‘this is OK, I can do this’,” she says. “It's great for me to be back in the pool, as it helps me with being more active too.”

After attending the sessions, Claire planned her first trip by plane since her surgery 11 years previously: a holiday to Iceland, including visits to its famous geothermal pools.

“I don't have to worry about that so much because of having been in the swimming pool [at the RUH]. The sessions give us wings to be able to go in the water anywhere – including Iceland!”

Claire is not alone – the feedback received by the Stoma Therapy team shows that patients felt more confident using public pools or going to the beach after attending a Water Confidence session.

The sessions will now run until September. Patients who would like to take part should contact the Stoma Therapy team for more information or to book a place. The team also run a social support group where patients can make connections.

## **Ends**

### **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](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk)