

West Yorkshire Branch back on track

Following a successful pre-meeting at the end of April with a good turnout, a follow-up meeting took place on 11 May where a core group agreed to attend future meetings and support events.

A small group of three, spearheaded by Robin Thomas, are developing a programme for the 2009-10 season.

Robin Thomas, Barrett's Support Network representative for the region, writes:

"Around 20 people attended the re-launch meeting of the proposed West Yorkshire branch of the Barrett's Oesophagus Campaign, held on Thursday 30 April at Pontefract General Infirmary.

There was enough enthusiasm to suggest the real prospect of strong branch being developed.

After an excellent buffet in the Pontefract Infirmary Post Graduate Education Centre, generously supplied by the Mid Yorkshire Trust, Consultant Gastroenterologist Dr Pulak Sahay, delivered an entertaining yet hard-hitting presentation on Barrett's.

He has researched the history of endoscopy and patients will be relieved to know that practice has moved on from the sword swallowing techniques of the pioneers! He stressed the key point that those with chronic heartburn should seek medical advice. Referral for an endoscopy might reveal Barrett's and a need for medication, life-style changes and surveillance. Greater public awareness was essential, together with fundraising for research - and he urged the audience to become involved in the new branch.

Earlier, Dr Sahay and the subject of Barrett's had received excellent publicity via a significant feature on BBC Look North on Wednesday 29 April, and with an informative article in the Yorkshire Evening Post. The TV news item also featured the patient, Ian Gamble who had successfully returned to long distance running after the removal of his oesophagus - a very good news story.

At this point, I circulated the new leaflets and urged people to consider becoming involved in the new branch. I described the activities available for a branch, quoting the examples of Cambridge and Wessex in inviting distinguished consultants and academics to talk about the latest research. In addition, I suggested that it would be great for Yorkshire to emulate the cycle marathon round the Isle of Wight which raised so much sponsorship. Forms were filled in and I will convene a meeting in some four weeks' time to identify potential activists. Dr Sahay agreed to organise another meeting in six months to keep the momentum going.

More recently:

A follow-up meeting took place on Monday 11 May and 12 people came along. They are all willing to attend future meetings and support events.

Two of them will meet with me on Friday 26 June to take the plan further and We will try to produce a programme for the 2009-10 season, probably starting this September.

I have also been trying to spread the net more widely. Bradford Hospital will consider how to help and will come back after their next gastro team meeting.

I have not had any luck yet with Calderdale and as yet, a nil response from Huddersfield. However, this will not deter me and I will set something up anyway, with support from Dr Pulak Sahay.

He has given me a contact in Salford and I am hoping to create some activity with the support of David Hird, my Warrington contact. I am also going to receive good support from Dorothy Cherry, recently arrived in West Yorkshire, with plenty of experience of fundraising abroad. She is very keen to become involved and will help me co-ordinate things in this region.

However, before we get too excited, there will be a great deal of hard work in the future to get things off the ground. But the signs are positive.

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