

NB: Lesley Hurst is a student at the University of Portsmouth and the following dissertation text concerns the place of hospital radio in the 21st century. HBA thanks Lesley for the permission to re-publish this copy of her dissertation.

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Hospital Radio: Life Behind the Microphone.

In early 2018 I was intrigued by an advertisement on a local freebie website which was asking for people to volunteer as radio presenters for my local hospital. Having never had the interest or confidence to consider this before, I decided to take the plunge and contact the station's secretary for more information. Before I could say, 'Good Morning Vietnam', I was in the studio being shown the ropes by Sharon, a presenter of three years and Roger a stalwart of some fifty years involvement with this age old form of media.

At nineteen and working as an aircraft engineer at RAF Bassingborne in Hertfordshire, he was asked if he would like to help with the base radio service and jumped at the chance. He was a natural and presented hundreds of shows to the staff at the base for the following three years. After a few years he was posted to Air Sea Rescue in Leconfield and the opportunity to help set up a new radio station on the camp.

Roger told me, 'It took six months of hard work to get the station up and running, it was certainly worth all the late nights and days off just to be able to broadcast from six in the evening until midnight. We managed to do a deal with a record shop in Beverley who supplied us with the weekly top ten records, which in the 1960s proved to be a godsend. Even though we were only an internal radio station we were kept busy with requests for the Beatles and Rolling Stones from the families that lived and worked on the base.'

After he left the RAF, Roger became involved with hospital radio for the first time, joining both Watford and Harefield Hospital Radio stations over the next three years. Radio presenting was put on hold whilst he and his wife became wardens for the Caravan and Camping Club, which meant moving around the country looking after the clubs sites. But radio presenting was in his blood and he eventually settled in West Sussex and jumped at the chance of taking up the microphone once more at St Richards in Chichester. On retiring he moved to Gosport and from then on has been an active member of the Queen Alexandra Hospital Radio, delighting listeners twice a week with his eclectic mix of old and new tunes. At the sprightly age of 83yrs he is still going strong and definitely has the dulcet tones perfect for radio. With a mentor as wise and knowledgeable as Roger, I have embraced the mantle of being a radio presenter, enjoying every minute I spend choosing and playing, not only favourite songs but tracks from albums you may not hear on the mainstream radio stations. Songs that not only I love but that my listeners, made up of both hospital staff and patients who ring or email to request songs. There are of course certain songs we are advised not to play, such as Norman Greenbaums' Spirit in the Sky and of course, I Just Died in your Arms Tonight by Cutting Crew, generally though if a song is requested we do play it.

One of the things that interested me once I had started presenting, was the question '*Is anyone listening?*' With the introduction of more procedures being done as day surgery, the number of people staying in hospitals has changed with many being older patients who are waiting to be discharged home or into assisted living. Also with many people, especially the younger

ones having access to mobile phones and dare I mention MP3 players, is my 80's show ticking the box for those people or am I playing these tunes to myself. With this in mind I took myself off and spoke with both staff and patients to see if they believe hospital radio still has a place in the hospitals of the twenty-first century.

My first port of call was to the Orthopaedic wards where many of the patients have restricted mobility due to the nature of their illnesses and/or accidents and of course the corrective surgeries they may have had to fix them up. Daniel is a thirty-two year old who had a serious motorbike accident, he was knocked off his bike by a car and sustained two broken legs and numerous cuts and bruises. Fortunately, he is on the mend and with a few more weeks of intense physiotherapy he should be on his way home. Patients like Daniel are a captive audience, so I asked him if he listened to QAH Radio.

'It's only recently that I realised you existed,' he said, 'one of the nurses suggested I give it a go as I'm not able to get any WiFi in here. Being able to access music has been great, I love the mix of styles, I've found stuff I wouldn't have chosen to listen to at home I'm actually quite enjoying. It's definitely made my time here easier to bear as it gets very boring.'

Sarah, one of the staff nurses told me, 'Daniel has had days when he has been quite down, so being able to switch off and listen to the radio has helped him relax. It's good to see our patients putting down their phones and just lying quietly, it's very therapeutic

I was feeling very pleased at hearing how myself and the team at the radio station were having such a positive impact for Daniel but he was only one person and this is a big hospital. Onto the older person wards for their input into my research. The first person to speak to me was Daphne, her husband Michael had been in hospital for six weeks due to a virulent chest infection, his progress hampered by the Parkinson's disease he has suffered with for the last eight years. I asked Daphne if either of them listened to the hospital radio.

She explained 'With Michael being very shaky with his Parkinson's he finds it difficult to keep on the headphones provided. When I found out that you also stream live on the internet, I managed to find him a pair of wireless headphones that he can keep on and that are comfortable enough for him to wear for quite long periods of time. The only issue we have sometimes is the WiFi, as it drops out quite a lot but that's something we put up with. As a big country music fan he really enjoys the Country time show on a Tuesday, and the best part is he can continue to listen when he comes home.'

Dorothy is a hospital volunteer and told me, 'Whilst I'm sitting with the patients I encourage them to listen to music on the radio as I noticed that once I leave they miss the company and would call for the nurses to fill the void. We started getting them to fill out requests and I'd time my exit just after the request had been played. It seems to have worked really well, the patients love to hear their names read out over the air, it makes them feel connected.'

It seemed from the conversations I had that having the opportunity to listen to hospital radio was proving to play an satisfying part in the lives of both the patients and staff.

With technology in studios now including the ability to play direct from computers, stream tracks from online content and for many of us less computer able who still play the humble CD, we are now seeing a turn around in the way music is played.

Roger told me, 'It's interesting to have seen the changes, from the early studios with only a battered old record player to the high tech equipment I have had to learn how to use. But as always things tend to come back into fashion and when I started out, playing vinyl was our only option but something even now I've always insisted on using. Now I'm back in trend as vinyl records are back in vogue. Not bad for an old fella, eh!'

A recent impact study by The Hospital Broadcasting Association (HBA) substantiated that hospital radio does have an important and positive impact on the patients and staff who access it.

- ❖ 62% of radio stations said they have positive impact when used as distraction in clinics and pre-op waiting areas for those patients that feel nervous.
- ❖ 44% show evidence that they have a calming and relaxing affect in a ward setting.
- ❖ 92% evidenced that they have a positive impact on reducing boredom in patients.
- ❖ 71% include other content such as news, weather, sport and on air competitions.
- ❖ 76% said they included public information and wellbeing advice throughout the day and this creates a positive learning experience for the patients.

Overall, the impact study commissioned by the HBA shows that hospital radio contributes positively in the whole patient experience. The link between positive patient experience and clinical effectiveness was outlined by stating that if hospital radio improves a patients experience then their stay is reduced on average by one day. This equates to a saving of approximately £400 per patient per stay, the average cost of an NHS bed for one night.

With most radio stations being run by its volunteers the financial impact on the hospitals who give up space for them is minimal. Many are housed in areas which have no viable use for clinical or patient spaces so the psychological benefits far outweighs the monetary costs in allowing these areas to be used. One other benefit to the listener is that this service is free, unlike the television and other media services that are installed in most wards these days. As a presenter myself I recognise the enormous impact it's had on both my mental wellbeing and my social circle. My lifelong enjoyment of music coupled with the ability to share that with others is an amazing feeling. A close friend recently told me.

You light up and you visibly relax once you walk into the studio, watching you chatting away to your audience is wonderful, it's a beautiful thing to see, it's like you connect with everyone of them. If this is what it does for you, they must really perk them up.'

By giving up their time fundraising and presenting shows volunteers spend an average three hours a week keeping hospital radio alive. It certainly seems that there is still a place in our hospitals for this valuable asset and if you are unfortunate to have to spend time in hospital, remember pick up those headphones and turn that dial. You won't regret it.