



TICKER NEWS

Official newsletter of the North Gwent Cardiac Rehabilitation & Aftercare Charity



Nigel's epic cardiac adventure

Llanfoist class regular Nigel Dancer has been one of our valued Trustees since 2013. Here he charts his own heart journey, and explains how a business trip to Germany ultimately led him to get involved

“Are you coming for a walk?” It wasn't like me to make excuses, but I'd had a tiring weekend: a demanding hike uphill to the Lonely Shepherd stone at the top of Llangattock escarpment on the Saturday, followed by a full-on Sunday finishing two big new areas of decking at our Crickhowell bungalow. “Not this evening,” I told my wife Denise, “My back really hurts: I think I've pulled a muscle.”

On Monday morning I was still in pain, but I had a busy few days ahead so I made an appointment to see my GP later that week and headed off to my job as European Technical Director at TRICO, the windscreen wiper manufacturers in Pontypool. Later that day I flew to Germany with two colleagues ahead of a sales pitch to the massive Würth industrial group. I knew about the links between flying and deep-vein thrombosis, so I took an aspirin before the flight, and wonder now if that helped save my life.

Tuesday's schedule included a tour of the Würth site, followed by our presentation, then lunch. My back had started aching again, and by the end of the visit my legs felt heavy and I really didn't feel right. Luckily, Würth has its own medical team. They ran some checks and must have been worried, because within no time two ambulances arrived, along with a doctor in a separate car. “It looks like you're having a heart attack,” they told me after giving me an ECG, “but just a minor one.”

Fortunately for me, the nearby Schwäbisch Hall Hospital had a specialist cardiac unit. But when I handed over my corporate medical insurance card they told me it was no longer valid! Some frantic calls to Pontypool and our Detroit HQ revealed



the reason: my company had switched insurers but failed to issue new cards. With that mix-up sorted, I was seen by the hospital's Cardiac Professor and admitted to Critical Care overnight. The next morning, I was wired up for a treadmill test, which showed almost instantly that there was a problem with one of the arteries at the rear of my heart – probably the reason I had back pain.

Within an hour I was in the Cath Lab being prepped for an angiogram, so they could inject a special dye and see under X-ray if I had any narrowing in my coronary arteries. “The good news is we can fix you,” the doctors told me. “The bad news is you need a quintuple bypass.” That meant major surgery grafting veins to create *five* new pathways around narrowed sections of my coronary arteries.

The hospital said I could be flown back to the UK for my op. But when the insurers said they'd arrange a wheelchair and scheduled flight, the consultants put their foot down: “He needs to go by Air Ambulance with a medical team. Otherwise we'll be ordering a Medivac helicopter to take him to Munich for urgent surgery, and he may be there a while.” The insurers backed down, and on Saturday morning the cardiac team presented me with a CD of the angiogram and waved me off for the short trip by ambulance to the Adolf Würth Airport. Yes, Würth has its own airport! I was loaded on board a Beechcraft King Air 250, attended by a nurse and two doctors, and flown direct to Cardiff Airport, where an ambulance blue-lighted me straight to the Heath Hospital.

I spent a week on the Cardiac Ward and was then transferred to Critical Care awaiting my procedure. After a few false starts, on the Tuesday of my second week at the Heath, I finally made it >>

<< to the top of Professor von Oppell's list. I woke up the following day in Critical Care and needed several transfusions as I had lost more blood than originally thought. But on Friday I showed the physiotherapist I could climb a flight of stairs and was discharged home. I was 57.

Four years earlier my father had undergone a planned triple bypass at the age of 82. I'd naively told myself I never wanted to be in *that* situation, but here I was following in his footsteps. In hospital, the cardiologists had asked me why my cholesterol was so high. The truth was I rarely visited my GP and had never had it checked, despite there being a history of heart problems on both my mum and dad's sides. I was very lucky though, because there was virtually no damage to my heart.

I left hospital determined to make a good recovery and over the next few months wore a groove in the local park following the home exercise plan. Then I was offered the chance to attend Nevill Hall's Phase 3 Cardiac Rehab Programme, which at the time was at the Mardy Community Centre in Abergavenny. Unfortunately, I fainted during the exercise class, giving the instructor a nasty shock. Nevill Hall checked me out and gave me the all clear, but I went on to collapse twice more – once at home, and then again in my cardiologist's office. In the end, they reduced my medication, so I was on just aspirin and a statin. It means I have a higher than normal heart rate but no more fainting, thank goodness.

Part-way through the Phase 3 Programme, our lovely cardiac nurse, Suzanne Indge, convinced me to become a Trustee for the North Gwent Cardiac Rehabilitation & Aftercare Charity, and I moved on to their Phase 4 classes in October. By then I was back at work full time, although I'd arranged time off to attend

the weekday exercise classes. And in January 2014, I started doing the Charity's Saturday classes at Llanfoist as well. I've been going to classes two to three times a week now for the past 12 years, and I can see and feel the benefits – not just for me, but for other long-term members, too.

It's vital for heart patients to make exercise the cornerstone of their recovery. And it's not just about strengthening your heart. The whole-body workout you get at our classes strengthens your other muscles, too, reducing the overall strain on your

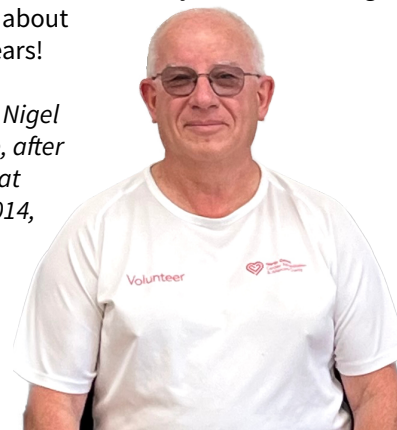
heart. And exercise can also help:

- control your blood sugar levels and reduce your risk of Type 2 diabetes
- lower your blood pressure
- reduce levels of bad cholesterol
- boost your circulation
- improve your sleep
- boost your mood and overall feeling of wellbeing

All of which play a big part in cutting your risk of developing further heart disease. Plus the simple act of getting out of the house and socialising with fellow members at our classes helps rebuild your confidence, so you can get on with

enjoying life. After all, Cardiac Rehab is not just about adding more years to your life; it's about adding more life to your years!

Previous page: our Trustee Nigel Dancer with his wife Denise, after completing a 10-mile walk at Swansea Bay in January 2014, nine months after his quintuple bypass. Right: Nigel today, still working part-time, volunteering for us and loving life!



WHAT I LEARNED

- ✓ Knowing your family heart history gives you a golden opportunity to minimise your own heart health risks. I now have an annual check-up, including a cholesterol test.
- ✓ Learn to say no! And try to avoid getting too stressed at work.
- ✓ You are not alone. Talk to your Class Instructor if you have any concerns – they can help guide your recovery.
- ✓ Keep going to classes!

Share your joy in the outdoors for our 2027 calendar!

We're planning our 2027 fundraising calendar – and we'd love your photos to be part of it. This year's theme is "Joy in the Outdoors", celebrating the simple, uplifting moments we find when we step outside.

What kind of photos can you send?

The theme is wide open. It could be sunlight through trees, lambs frisking in a field, a garden bursting with colour, or something quirky, like a group of smiling snowmen, or muddy wellies splashing through a puddle.

We'll need a total of 12 colourful shots – one for each month. So as well as taking photos now, do hunt back through your archives for photos that illustrate the colder months. You can

submit up to three images this year. All we ask is that your photos are taken somewhere in Wales and that no clearly identifiable people appear in them. So silhouettes, backs of heads, or close-ups of hands or feet are fine – but no recognisable faces, please.

Deadline

Please submit your entries by 5pm on Friday 31 July.

Photo requirements

To help us create a high-quality printed calendar, photos need to be:

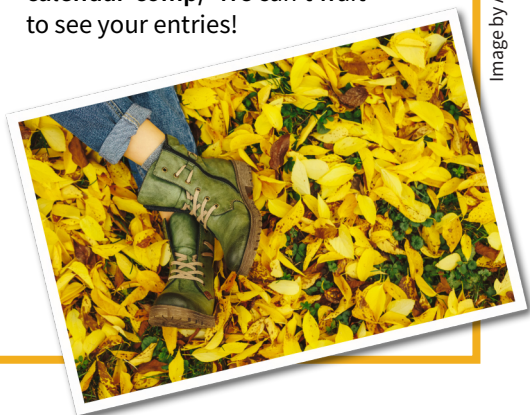
- digital files – jpg is best
- landscape format – so your photos must be wider than they are tall
- high resolution – large, clear images that are not blurry or pixelated

Each entry should also include:

- a title for the photo
- a short note on where it was taken
- the month or season it was taken

How to submit

Simply upload your photo and details using the form on our website – go to cardiac-rehab.org.uk/calendar-comp/ We can't wait to see your entries!



Health assessments on track

We offer members a health check every six months to help keep them on course with their goals. Instructors **Joe Lane** and **Tom Stone** sum up the latest results

BLAENAVON CLASS

We completed our six-monthly health assessments at the end of February. Nine members took part and had their height, weight and blood pressure readings recorded by Class Assistant Allen Cleveland.

Members were also asked to undertake a six-minute cardiovascular test – either using gym equipment or shuttle walking. The effort was fantastic from all participants, with particular highlights being 700m covered on the rower, over 2km cycled on the stationary bike and over 500m walked. Not bad for a class with an average age over 70!

Well done to these members for their hard work – and for building on their results since then. We're looking forward to repeating the assessments towards the end of the summer and recording more progress! **JOE LANE**

LLANFOIST SATURDAY CLASSES

A total of 24 members took part in our January health assessments – a fantastic turnout! For the six-minute shuttle walking test, 10 participants covered more than 400m, 11 walked 350m-400m, and only 3 walked less than 350m – although this was due to problems such as arthritis rather than lack of cardiovascular fitness. These results put most participants within the normal range (350m+) for their age.

Carrying more weight around your middle – having a so-called “apple shape” – can increase your risk of heart disease and stroke, so we take waist and hip measurements as it's a useful

way to assess abdominal fat.

These results were also very positive, with 85% of participants in the low to moderate risk category for abdominal fat.

Blood pressure readings were good, too, with no-one recording a systolic pressure (the top number on a reading) above 150mmHg. In fact, 50% of participants were spot-on for blood pressure, with readings between 90-120mmHg systolic and 60-90mmHG diastolic.

For the other half, 22% recorded readings of 120-130/60-90, and a further 28% had higher readings of 140-150/60-90. We've advised these members to keep an eye on their blood pressure, and to see their GP if they find their readings stay above their target range.

Heart rate checks showed 23 participants were in the normal range, with 60-90 beats per minute (bpm). The only member with a higher heart rate was still under the 100bpm risk threshold. He's known by his GP to have a higher heart rate, and has done for many years.

It's great to see such positive results for the group as a whole, but the assessments also help us pick up changes in individual members that warrant further investigation. For example, during last year's health assessments, we identified one member whose heart rate had increased substantially from their previous assessment. That led to a GP visit and a change of medication. **TOM STONE**



Image by Freepik

HOW WE HELP INSTRUCTORS

Part of our job as a charity is to support the training and development of Cardiac Rehab Exercise Instructors. Earlier this year we provided a stipend for **Marietta Segal** to undertake the BACPR's Specialist Exercise Instructor qualification. She's now in the final stages of the course and we'll have more on her progress in the next issue.

And we recently provided a bursary of just over £220 for Exercise Specialist **Matthew Gummer**, who runs classes at Newport's St Woolos Hospital. The grant will allow him to attend the BACPR's Spring Study Day in Birmingham later this month. Theme for the day is “Optimising Heart Health Through Physical Activity and Exercise”, and we look forward to featuring Matthew's report in our next *Ticker News*.

Instructors wishing to apply for a bursary can now do so through our website: just click on the **Funding Application Form** link in the Health Professionals section at cardiac-rehab.org.uk/resources/

GOOD TO KNOW

If your blood pressure is on the high side, reducing it by just 10mmHG can cut your risk of a heart attack or stroke by 20%.

Source: Blood Pressure UK

Always in safe hands

We've just spent £890 replacing the batteries and chest pads for our Instructors' portable IPAD defibrillators. The batteries last four years and the chest pads need renewing every two years.

It's a big outlay for us, but it's essential for ensuring the three defibs are always 100% reliable and ready for use: it's just one of the ways we put members' safety and wellbeing at the heart of our classes.





May
03

Ruth's Three Peaks challenge

On **Sunday 03 May** our supporter **Ruth Cornish** will be tackling the **South Wales Three Peaks Trial** route with some intrepid friends as the third of six fundraising challenges she's taking on for us this year.

The **20-mile loop** includes the summits of the Bloreng, Sugarloaf and Skirrid Mountains, with a whopping **5,000ft of ascent** along the way. Ruth's a seasoned trail runner, but as she's never done the route before, it will be a test of her navigation skills as well.

Ruth's already raised some **£600** towards her **£1,000 target** for the year, with a massage day and a pop-up stall in Crickhowell selling entries for our annual Potato Challenge. We're hugely grateful for her support.

If you'd like to sponsor her challenge, please see **Class Assistant Allen Cleveland**, or sponsor her direct through Just Giving by scanning the QR code.



June
13

Join us for a Night of Heart & Harmonies

Our Trustees **Nigel, Gareth and Tony** are hosting a special fundraising concert at Crickhowell's **Clarence Hall** on **Saturday 13 June**, and we'd love you to join us!

Our **Night of Heart & Harmonies** will feature the stirring voices of the **Tredegar Orpheus Male Voice Choir** plus special guest **Stephanie Webber**, who got her big break on TV's *The Voice*, and young local talent **Clara Phillips**, who is just 15, but already a rising star.

Expect an uplifting programme of songs from the heart, with everything from traditional hymns, to musical theatre hits and contemporary classics – plus a few surprises! Tickets cost **£12.50** and are available from **Class Assistant Allen Cleveland** or online from **zeffy.com** – just scan the QR code.



VOLUNTEER AND ENJOY THE SHOW FOR FREE!

We need help to run the concert, so we're looking for volunteers to:

- **help set up the bar beforehand** – approx 3:30pm-4:30pm
- **take tickets on the door** – doors open 6:30pm for 7pm start
- **sell raffle tickets** for our hamper
- **help run the bar** – either pouring drinks or taking payment by cash or card
- **collect empty glasses** and load/unload the glass washer during the interval and after the concert
- **help clear up** at the end of the event.



If you'd like to get involved, please give your name to **Allen** or contact **Jacky Miles** on **07484 658 319** by **16 May**.

POTATO CHALLENGE WEIGH IN

July
11

Many thanks to everyone who's entered our **2026 Potato Growing Challenge**. Thanks to your enthusiasm, plus some generous donations, this year's Challenge has raised close to **£800** towards our annual **£12,000** fundraising target.

Your seed potatoes should all be growing well by now, enjoying the spring warmth, putting out plenty of leaves and and hopefully starting to form little tubers deep inside their pots. Keep them watered and fed, and keep topping up your pot with soil or compost to encourage more spuds to form along the stems.

And don't forget the **Grand Reveal and Weigh-In** is at the **Abergavenny Garden Centre** on **Saturday 11 July** from **2pm-4pm**. If you'd like to volunteer to help at this fun event, please let **Class Assistant Allen Cleveland** know by **01 July**!



Are you feeling lucky?

July
15

We're delighted to be taking part in the **Rotary Marches Community Draw** again this year. This fabulous cash prize draw is run by the **Rotary Clubs of Abergavenny and Monmouth** as a fundraiser for selected local organisations. The Rotary Clubs provide the prizes and tickets, we sell as many tickets as we can and keep the proceeds to help fund our work. Simple!

Tickets cost **£1 each** and will be available from **15 July**. So if you'd like to buy tickets, or help us sell them, just speak to **Class Assistant Allen Cleveland** or contact **Trustee Nigel Dancer** on **07740 376136**.

The winning tickets will be drawn at the **Monmouth Raft Race** on **Sunday 6 September**, with 5 x cash prizes to be won:
✓ 1st prize: **£250**
✓ 2nd and 3rd prizes: **£150**
✓ 4th and 5th prizes: **£75**
Good luck!

