



### **Chair's speech, AGM 2021:**

It's been a long, tough year for all of us - it is almost one year to the day since Boris Johnson said we 'must' stay at home and that some businesses would close immediately"... It was the start of Joe Wicks every morning with my youngest daughter who we'd collected from University the week before (and we were all struggling to comprehend how the world was shutting up shop).

A walk every day at 6pm, not only for her mental health but mine too and a great bonding session which we did until she went back in September. My other daughter was also living at home on her placement year and, that first weekend of lockdown, my husband was banished to one room as he had mild symptoms. A interesting week of taking meals on a tray to the bedroom, wearing of gloves and sanitising everything in sight. We all lost our sense of taste and smell over the next two weeks which was great for my cooking as no-one mentioned the taste of anything! Luckily, we remained well and settled in to our 'new life' together.

My initial aim for the LOC was to keep everyone up to date as quickly as we could, disseminate the huge amounts of information we were receiving on a daily and sometimes hourly basis, provide as much support to all whether they were locums, practice owners, staff members, multiples or independents. I wanted Herts LOC to become the first place for you to contact with your queries or requests for advice and guidance. I wanted to strengthen our relationships with not only the CCGs but with the hospitals, other services in our area and providers of eyecare. We should be proud of what we have achieved - such as finding practitioners to assist the Diabetic Eye Screening Service within a week at a time when they came to us desperate for help - they had a backlog of 7,000 patients all needing to be seen and, in total, they see 27,000 on an annual basis. We also arranged for the final two years of University of Hertfordshire Optometry students becoming approved for Covid vaccinations within a week as well. We made new links with the Herts Vision Loss charity amongst others which will be useful to us all and our patients.

The communications received have been vast - two Hertfordshire CCGs, West Essex LOC, Optegra, SpaMedica, CHEC, Lister, Princess Alexander and West Herts Hospitals, NHS England and Improvement, LOCSU, and the East of England LOC group who have been of immense support in trying to solve all the incessant number of queries received. Examples range from helping a sole Domiciliary provider finally get the grant owing to him to ensuring practices were listed correctly on the NHS list of who was open, again to enable the grants to be paid. PPE queries when PPE was scarce - receiving emergency supplies from the LRF for Hertfordshire in an NHS truck to my front door, to then having the visors recalled the next week as they weren't up to the required standard!

There are so many examples of where the LOC has successfully resolved practitioners concerns in an enormous variety of areas that I never considered I would get involved with. Trying but not yet successfully, to get CUES or MECS commissioned - Hertfordshire CCGs are still happy with the current services. I had frequent contact with the Clinical Services director for Moorfields (Gordon Hay) who despaired that patients being sent to MEH without prior approval. After lots of discussions, we settled on a plan which seems to have worked so thank you all for taking this on board. I also represented us in daily 3pm 'huddles' (an NHS word, not mine!) for much of January to understand a new electronic eye referral system which aimed to give us the ability to upload images, even full volume OCT scans to the hospitals for advice and referral. Our ICS of West Essex and Hertfordshire decided not to proceed with this at present as there was insufficient funding, nothing guaranteed for year two and not enough background work as to what we or the hospitals needed, to make it a success. I felt this was the correct decision for us to make. However, it did mean I learnt a great deal about commissioning and how many people have to be involved to procure these systems.

The workload has been and still is continuous with many interesting and challenging moments - there were days when I didn't leave the laptop and Zoom or Teams became the norm, with no time worry about your room background!! The first year I was Chair, the LOC sent out three newsletters to just over two hundred contacts on our list. This year, we have sent more than 130 emails to over 400 contacts - so many that at one point that we were blocked by Google as they thought it was spam and Steve had to swap to Mailchimp, learn a new process instantly in order to continue sending our updates. This illustrates the huge effort needed behind the scenes to constantly update you all. Our mailing list has almost doubled, hopefully demonstrating the LOC's success in communications. The updates have increased exponentially - an increase of over 4000% - yes, I had to get this checked as I couldn't believe it was that much. This equates to 40 times the number of emails being sent out by us.

Lastly, I want to give special thanks to Steve who has been unfailingly reliable throughout, putting up with me being a night owl and constantly supporting me - he scored top spot in my contacts for many months!! Also, the Vice Chairs (Sumila & Hansil) who've again responded immediately with secure and reliable advice, Eileen who keeps us all on track financially and did query my hours, on your behalf, when I submitted them, and all the rest of you who I feel honoured to have got to know so well. There have been so many moments to remember - Anita and I went for a dog walk to discuss CHEC and the CCG - almost 2 hours later, she and I returned having talked constantly and she'd walked my legs off.... Wendy, who I have gone to for advice with CCG/NHSE discussions and been able to utilise her vast experience and knowledge. Peter who's always so supportive and occasionally sends me articles of interest (the last one, I must confess was beyond me though!). Katie, who I called whilst I was walking along the canal, so engrossed in our conversation that I forgot to walk home and continued along the canal towpath for much further than planned. Mary and Sally - with the CET - little did we know what a success online CET would be! Kavita - thanks for all the Lister info and responding straight away to my queries. Amisha - who is getting involved with our future CET and I said could not take maternity leave from the LOC! Dawn - I promise I won't talk so much as the recordings are so long - but thank you for your accuracy in editing our meetings and sending on all the many communications you receive from practitioners. Daniel -

again, your experience and knowledge from previous years on the LOC is really appreciated, Sai Karan - the WhatsApp group has been an invaluable instant alternative means of communication, from which we have all benefitted and to David - it takes a year or two to get to understand the workings of the LOC and I know we will be utilising your skills more in the future.

Finally, to Amnish who is sadly stepping down due to work and family commitments. I'd like to put on record our thanks for his input over the years.

I hope to be able to continue as your Chair - I believe there is more we can do and I'd like to be part of our continuing journey as the pandemic hopefully becomes under control and life can settle in to a 'new' normal. It has been a year like no other; I want to thank you all as I have appreciated your support throughout and the LOC should be proud that we have continued to provide an outstanding service for our members as our role specifies. We have received numerous emails of thanks which have been so uplifting when sometimes there seemed no end to the workload.

Jane