

Message from Niki Tompkinson to Branch members

When I wrote my piece for the recent (September 2020) edition of The Park, I said that we were awaiting a decision from Parkinson's UK as to whether any of our in-person activities could be restarted. At the end of August, we were advised that we could move cautiously towards some resumption, if you, our members, wanted us to, but that we should move slowly and carefully. Parkinson's UK produced detailed guidance to help us with decision-making and with assessing the risk. Since then, as we all know, the government has changed the national guidelines again – **restricting** contact between individuals and groups (the “rule of six”) rather than **easing** it, and stricter rules for businesses and hospitality venues. There have been clear messages that COVID is continuing to spread and that we should expect to have to follow the rules for at least a further six months, but there has also been an acknowledgement that a return to full lockdown is undesirable for many reasons – economic and social. Striking the right balance is difficult.

These latest changes have not altered the overall decision by Parkinson's UK, as voluntary activities and services can be exempted from the “rule of six”. But it does give us all pause for thought as to how and whether we make any changes during the coming weeks and months. The Branch's activities fall into four broad categories – exercise, singing, social, and respite care – and at the moment the committee's proposals are as follows:

- **Exercise.** Within the community, gyms have reopened and classes can be held so long as they comply with rules for social distancing and cleansing, and are strictly for exercise or medical and **not** for social purposes. According to our exercise providers, some of you have signalled that you are ready to return to face-to-face classes, while others want to stay with the on-line provision. We are therefore working with providers to ensure that their proposals and risk assessments adhere to Government rules and Parkinson's UK's guidance and that they can continue to cater for those who wish or need (for safety reasons) to stay with on-line or video provision as well as those who prefer and are able to return to classes. Your provider may have already canvassed your opinion, but we will need to ask you to complete a short questionnaire before we make a decision. If you receive one, **please return it by the deadline given**. Providers will also need to give us costings so we can review how much the Branch will fund and how much we may need to ask participants to contribute.
- **Singing.** Emily Bollon has no plans to resume her face-to-face sessions for the Parkinson's Voices, given the difficulties of social distancing and the special conditions, which choirs have to adhere to. The virtual choir is going from strength to strength, with great plans for a Christmas event.
- **Social.** Our monthly Zoom meetings are working well, and we have speakers booked for the Autumn. We had already decided that a Christmas lunch was not going to be possible this year. We do not

propose to take any steps towards resuming face-to-face social activities this Autumn but will see how things develop. We may ask for your views later in the year, when the national situation looks a little clearer. In the meantime, for those of you who miss the face-to-face meetings with other members, there is nothing to stop you meeting each other on a personal basis, so long as you comply with the rule of six, or any other government rules which issue.

- **Respite care.** There is no change to our support for the respite care packages provided by Crossroads Care. And we are in the process of setting up a Carers Zoom group, which carers have already been invited to express interest in.

I hope this is all clear. Please do not hesitate to let me have any views on the above, or to tell me if there are other things the Branch could be doing for you during this continuing difficult period.

1 October 2020