

Spotlight

Issue 18 2025
FREE



Our latest
funding news

Bringing virtual
reality to life

Meet our therapy
dog Harvey



How Friends of ANCHOR can support you

Our wellbeing team is based in the ANCHOR Unit – the Aberdeen and North Centre for Haematology, Oncology and Radiotherapy.



SUPPORT IN THE ANCHOR UNIT

Wellbeing support

Available Monday to Friday, our team offers a listening ear, practical support and signposting services. Look out for them in their red polo shirts.

Complementary therapies

Our free chair and bedside therapies include massage, reflexology and mini manicures. We also offer barbering, physio, and podiatry.

Volunteer-led services

Look out for our volunteers in red tees, who extend a warm welcome and way-finding support to day patients and visitors, with daily rounds of our refreshment trolley too.

Our drivers provide transport for stem cell transplants, while our Listening Service is a lifeline within the inpatient setting - where our therapist volunteer Stephanie and her pup Harvey visit oncology patients once a week too.

Ward assistants

Recognisable by their green polo shirts, our ward assistants are there to offer non-clinical aid to patients and their loved ones, as well as staff.

PRACTICAL SUPPORT

Free packs + provisions

We offer provisions to bring comfort and practical support at various stages of treatment.

Our free WiFi is available throughout the ANCHOR Unit and we can loan you an iPad if you'd like to stay in touch with loved ones.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Making memories

Available for people receiving end of life care. Applications are reviewed by a clinical panel and once approved, our wellbeing team facilitates all elements to make possible a memory that can be treasured.

Treat tickets

Look out for our regular draws for sporting and social events, which are free to enter in the ANCHOR Unit.

Retreat days

Connect with others and sample our wellbeing offering at our regular retreats.
2025 retreat days:
Jun 28, Nov 1

Confident You

Our Confident You series is specially designed to help you regain your confidence through or after a diagnosis, with singing, movement and mindfulness on offer.

To find out more about each of our three workshops, which run in blocks throughout the year, visit the patient area on our website.



For up-to-the-minute information on all our free support, scan the QR code.

To make a service request or speak to the wellbeing team, please contact:
wellbeing@friendsofanchor.org
01224 859222

Welcome to Spotlight Issue 18



Hello readers,

We're always grateful for the local support we receive, and I'm glad we have the opportunity to demonstrate the impact you make in this latest issue of Spotlight.

From advances in brachytherapy training and colorectal cancer research, to supporting patients and staff with the arrival of CAR-T cell therapy in the north-east, you are helping drive real progress. We're also thrilled that The ANCHOR Centre will open next year – a long-anticipated milestone.

Thanks to your generosity, our team can advance new initiatives and channels of support both in the hospital and in the community. Our virtual reality headset offers patients a welcome escape during treatment, and our new Confident You sessions are supporting people beyond the clinical setting.

As Chairman, I'm constantly inspired by the dedication of our colleagues in the ANCHOR Unit and the NHS. Their commitment to excellence is mirrored in our own work – including funding our seventh clinical fellow, who has begun a PhD focused on harnessing the immune system to fight lymphoma.

This issue also celebrates our incredible fundraisers – some who've been with us for a decade, and others new to the fold who raised £15,000 in one year in memory of a loved one. It's incredibly moving to see such hope and action rise from grief.

I heard it said once that despite the heartache a diagnosis brings, love always wins. It's something we witness every day at Friends of ANCHOR.

Sir James Milne

– Sir James Milne, Chairman

Meet two of our 2025 catwalk stars

Our models Barry Wilson & Kirsteen Deighton share their stories and what it means to be taking part in Brave and Courage on the Catwalk this year.

BARRY’S STORY:



Barry Wilson credits a chance conversation with an old friend for catching his cancer diagnosis early.

If his friend hadn’t stopped to chat and revealed fears his prostate cancer had spread to his bones, Barry admits he probably wouldn’t have gone to get checked out himself.

At the time, the self-employed joiner was considering retirement – not suspecting that the pain he occasionally felt through the night could be anything to worry about.

The 68-year-old, from Westhill, said: “I’d had checks pre-Covid, but after chatting to my friend I got a blood test. My PSA levels came back slightly higher than normal for my age, so I was sent for further tests.

“The specialist could feel scarring on both sides of my prostate, and I was sent for an MRI scan and biopsies.”

Those confirmed that Barry had an aggressive form of prostate cancer, with doctors immediately setting him up with 20 sessions of radiotherapy and a two-year hormone therapy treatment plan.

“My consultant assured me they’d caught it early,” the grandfather-of-five said. “But if it hadn’t been for my friend giving me the push to go to the doctor and get tested, who knows where I’d be today.”

Barry has nothing but praise for the radiotherapy team and the Friends of ANCHOR volunteers who greeted him at every appointment.

“At that first appointment it really did feel like I was going into the unknown, but there in the corridor was a volunteer in a red T-shirt ready to chat. She told me where to go and what to expect – it was just the reassurance I needed.”

“The radiotherapy team were amazing, and assured me there was nothing to worry about. I had such a laugh with them over the four weeks I was in – I’m a cheeky chappy.”

Barry is now keen to use his time in the Brave spotlight to encourage other men to get checked out.

The whole family, including wife Joyce, sons Scott and Jamie and step-children Scott and Kelly and their wives and partners, are behind his efforts – with oldest grandson, Tyler, even acting as his personal trainer at the gym to get him into shape for his catwalk debut.

“I’ve always been self-employed, so I’ve never really had a group of colleagues around me – but Brave is a great opportunity to meet others.” said Barry.

“In such a short period of time we’ve gone from being strangers to cheering each other on, sharing our stories and forming friendships – it’s been amazing.”



KIRSTEEN’S STORY:

For nurse Kirsteen Deighton, her cancer diagnosis was a “bolt out the blue”.

The mother-of-two was still settling into her new role in the ANCHOR Unit’s Ward 112 when she got the news she had rectal cancer.

She had put her constant tiredness down to adjusting to the routine of a new job, but in hindsight believes she should have pushed for answers from her GP sooner.

The 55-year-old, from Newtonhill, said: “I was passing blood a lot but because of Covid restrictions I couldn’t see my GP. I managed to get my bloods taken though, and they didn’t show anything was wrong – I was just told to go back if the problem continued.

“I knew that I’d be getting my bowel cancer screening in a few months so I waited for that – in hindsight, I should have gone back to my GP.”

Kirsteen’s screening test – a home sample kit sent to everyone aged 50-74 - confirmed there was a problem, and in August 2022 she was diagnosed. “It was a bolt of the blue,” she admits, revealing she was off work for several months during her treatment.

Kirsteen underwent radiotherapy and chemotherapy, which helped shrink the tumour ahead of surgery. However, she developed deep-vein thrombosis which delayed the surgery – making her worry the tumour might grow again.

Despite her fears, Kirsteen was determined to put on a brave face for her two children, Keri, 28, and Mitch, 26. Kirsteen’s husband died suddenly in 2016, and she was set on reassuring her family, including five-year-old granddaughter Rylee, that she would be OK.

“I was really fortunate as I had lots of family and friends to get me through,” she said. “My mum has dementia so I didn’t tell her initially – it wasn’t fair. My dad had bowel cancer 14 years ago though and he kept me positive, reminding me he was still here. He died in 2023, but I’m so grateful he saw me recover.”

Now back at work in the ANCHOR Unit, Kirsteen sees firsthand the support Friends of ANCHOR gives to patients on a daily basis. She herself enjoyed foot massages from the charity’s complementary therapists during her treatment, and says the wellbeing team in red T-shirts, who go round with the daily newspapers and chat to patients every morning, are “wonderful”.

“Friends of ANCHOR is a fabulous charity, and I don’t think people realise how much they do to help not only the patients on the wards, but also the staff. Taking part in Courage is a way of giving just a little bit back.”



Fancy applying to be in next year’s line-up?
Scan the QR code to register your interest!

Clinical fellowship the 'right next step' for haematology registrar

Friends of ANCHOR is funding a three-year, £300,000 research and development programme thanks to fundraisers and donors.

For Dr Abhi Mathur, landing a fully-funded clinical fellowship has been a dream come true.

The Friends of ANCHOR scheme is allowing the haematology registrar to combine the "best bits" of his day job – caring for his patients - with his interest in research that pushes the boundaries of what we know about blood conditions.

Dr Mathur completed his foundation and core medical training in Aberdeen and is now mid-way through the five-year mandatory training required to become a haematology specialist.

When he saw Friends of ANCHOR's fellowship advertised, he knew the opportunity would complement and strengthen his training even further.

"My day-to-day role is varied, with most of it involving speaking to patients on the ward or reviewing them in the clinic, chemotherapy or day case unit. We also perform procedures like bone marrow tests and interpret them under the microscope to identify a diagnosis - and there's an on-call commitment too."

"For the fellowship, I've taken time out of the programme, so I'm not working in the department day-to-day but I still do on-call and out-of-hours shifts and weekends to help support the registrar rota, and one clinic a month so I'm still getting the interactions with the patients and staff, which I love.

"I knew the fellowship was a great opportunity and that I had to apply for it. I've always been interested in doing research, and have done various projects through my career so far. The opportunity to complete a funded PhD was something I was very excited about. It's the right next step for me in my stage of career."

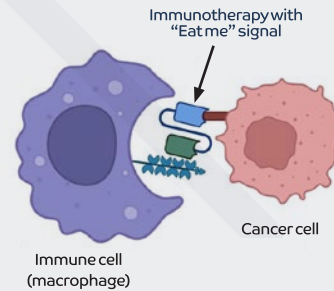
As part of the three-year clinical fellowship at the University of Aberdeen, Dr Mathur is working towards a PhD which looks at ways to reprogramme the immune system to fight lymphoma, or as Abhi puts it: "training white blood cells to eat cancer cells."

"What we're doing in the laboratory is developing new immunotherapies to target cancer, by trying to convince the immune system that these cancer cells are bad and must be eaten. We're essentially trying to trick the immune system to eat these cancer cells."

"The actual process of making these new immunotherapies involves making a yeast system – using bakers' yeast and other yeast species – they're our 'factories', if you will."

"These yeast machines decorate cancer treatment (antibody) with sugar molecules."

"That sugar molecule is seen as an attractive target for the immune system."



Once the antibody with the sugar decoration binds onto the cancer cell, the immune system can come and eat it.

Dr Mathur said he's grateful for the chance to work with his supervisors, professors Mark Vickers, Ian Stansfield and Heather Wilson.

He said: "I love it. It's a chance to work on critical scientific research, surrounded by colleagues thinking in the same way. That critical thinking is often very difficult to do in a busy ward or clinic – as patients must be the first priority."

"This programme is exactly what I needed as my ultimate goal is to be a clinical academic so this is ideal for me."

"Friends of ANCHOR very generously fund the research so we can do the science we want to do and ask the questions we want answers to. Ultimately, that benefits patients' care too."

Dr Mathur

The 7th clinical fellow funded by Friends of ANCHOR through the years

First person to undergo pioneering cell therapy in Aberdeen hails medical team

Nancy Gray, who is the first patient to undergo CAR T-cell therapy tells us why it was a 'no brainer' to have the treatment locally.

Nancy Gray



"It feels like a new chapter - everything is just falling into place now," Nancy Gray said, sounding relieved.

In the last few months, the 68-year-old has become the first to go through a pioneering cancer treatment in Aberdeen, and she's sold her house and had an offer accepted on a new bungalow.

But this time last year, things weren't looking so rosy.

Nancy and her husband Jim were coming to terms with the fact her non-Hodgkin lymphoma had returned, just months after being given the all-clear.

She said: "It started in June 2023 when I was on holiday and began feeling unwell - I felt like something was growing inside of me."

After losing one-and-a-half stone in three weeks, Nancy's GP referred her to ARI, where tests and biopsies confirmed she had high-grade non-Hodgkin lymphoma in her spleen.

Chemotherapy started quickly, and Nancy was struck by the care she received from both the medical teams and Friends of ANCHOR staff.

"The nurses and staff were amazing, I was so scared and nervous, but the team in the orange zone went above and beyond. The FoA team were there offering manicures and pedicures – it felt unreal, being able to speak to someone else and relax as they massaged your feet or did your nails. It was a very welcome distraction during a traumatic time."

In January 2024, Nancy was given the all clear. However, she soon noticed difficulties with her sinuses, and in April it was confirmed the cancer had returned – this time behind her nose.

Nancy, from Bridge of Don, said: "It was a different chemo this time, and I'd be OK for a couple of days and then I'd end up in hospital.

"Ward 112 became my second home. The team there are amazing. Every single nurse in there is deserving of a medal for the job they do."

Nancy said that Lisa and Richard from Friends of ANCHOR's wellbeing team were also great at checking in:

"The team in red polos all make you feel that you matter. I know they'll say they're just doing their job, but I think it's beyond that - they really are all amazing."

When tests suggested the chemo was not working this time, Dr Gavin Preston suggested to Nancy she would be suitable for CAR T-cell therapy – a treatment that uses a patient's own white cells to fight cancer.

It involves removing a patient's T-cells from their blood, genetically modifying them in a lab to produce chimeric antigen receptors (CARs) and growing them. They are then infused back into the patient, where they bind to cancer cells and kill them.

Until last year, the complex treatment was only done in Glasgow, Edinburgh or Newcastle – until Nancy became the first to have it done here in Aberdeen.

"I was prepared to travel for it, but Dr Preston said they were looking to start the treatment in Aberdeen and that he wanted me to be his first patient," Nancy said.

While her white blood cells were sent to Amsterdam for harvesting, Nancy underwent intense radiotherapy before having the 'new' cells put back into her.

"There were so many doctors around me – I felt like a celebrity. Because I was the first to have it done in Aberdeen, everyone wanted to see."

Nancy had been warned there are lots of potential side-effects to the treatment, and although she has lost a lot of strength in her legs, she feels she has been lucky.

Over the next few years, she'll need to build up her immune system, which will include having all her childhood inoculations again. In the meantime, she remains prone to infection.

However, just before Christmas she got confirmation the CAR T-cell therapy had been a success and her PET scan was clear – allowing her to look forward once more.

Nancy, who is mum to Richard, step-mum to Philip and grandmother to Lauren and Kaydn, said:

"When Dr Preston told me the therapy was the best option, I knew we had to try – and he assured me if it didn't work, we'd try something else. We knew the chemo wasn't working so it was a no brainer, despite the long list of possible side-effects.

"It's great for ARI to be further developing its care and treatments, and for the staff to be learning and seeing how this therapy works so it can help others locally. They were doing their best to help me, and I was more than happy to do my bit to fight the cancer as well.

"I decided long ago to be positive about it – the cancer is not going to beat me."



"I'm just lucky I get to share him with people, he's a good boy"

Meet volunteer Steph and her therapist Harvey, who visit ANCHOR patients every couple of weeks to spread some cheer.

When Steph Nicol visits the ANCHOR Unit, there's always a bit of a buzz and excitement.

But she's the first to admit it's not her that the patients and staff are excited to see – it's her golden retriever, Harvey.

The pair volunteer on Ward 114 every second Friday, spending up to three hours with patients and chatting to visitors and staff.

Steph, who registered Harvey to become a therapist after a chance encounter on her way to a Friends of ANCHOR fundraiser, loves seeing the positive impact their visits make each week.

She said: "I always say that if we can make one person smile with Harvey coming into the hospital, we've achieved what we wanted to."

"It usually happens before we even reach the ANCHOR Unit – it takes us about half an hour to get from the car to the ward as people always want to stop and speak to Harvey."

Once they've arrived, Harvey will offer a friendly wag or a comforting cuddle to any patient who would like to see him.

For those who are missing their own dogs at home, his visits can be a real mood-booster.

"There's always somebody excited to see him," Steph said. "Some people are just desperate to give him a pat or a cuddle

– and he gets fed lots of treats, so he's equally as delighted.

"When we arrive, someone will say 'Harvey's here!' and there's a buzz that spreads quite quickly. That's absolutely fine by me – it's all about Harvey. I'm just lucky that I get to share him with people, he's a good boy."

Steph's family are long-term supporters of Friends of ANCHOR through their Skene-based civil engineering company Nicol.

Over the last seven years, the firm has raised an incredible £50,000 for the charity.

They first got involved after staff member John Farquharson went through his own cancer experience and took part in Brave in 2018 - and their support hasn't wavered since.

They've taken part in Kiltwalk and our historic ANCHOR Wipeout event – and they organised their own dog walk and golf day too. There's been extra support in the form of sponsorship for our in-house events – and the engineering firm even makes a donation every time one of their suction excavators is hired out.

It was actually on the way to an ANCHOR Wipeout event at Hazlehead Park that Steph first heard about therapy dogs.

"I bumped into a couple of ladies and their carers, and they asked if they could speak to Harvey as they had recently lost their therapy dog at the care home," she said.

"At that time I didn't even know what a therapy dog was, but when I got home and did some research I decided to register Harvey through the Canine Concern Trust. Harvey passed his assessment when he was just a year old.

"In the beginning we visited care homes and universities, and workplaces for wellbeing days. It had always been the plan that I would go to the ANCHOR Unit with him, but then Covid hit."

As soon as restrictions lifted, Steph and Harvey registered for their bi-weekly visits to the Unit, and now, the duo are also firm favourites at our wellbeing retreat, where attendees lavish six-year-old Harvey with love and attention.

"More and more we're finding that pet therapy is such a positive thing. Just touching a dog, seeing a dog, being around them has such a good impact on peoples' mental health and we're seeing them being used more for stress awareness and mental health training."

"It's a really rewarding thing to do on a Friday afternoon, and both in and out of the ward I've had such a positive response from people getting to see Harvey."



Get to know Harvey

Breed: Golden retriever

Age: Turns 7 in May

Favourite toy: Stray sock

Favourite treat: Cheese, or cheddar crackers

Favourite walk: Any mountain – he's already bagged 50 munros!

Best trick: Speak – but he knows lots, including sit, lie down, spin, hug, whisper!

Sleep or play: Sleep

Housemates: Golden retriever Reo, dachshund Arlo and Gordon the cat



'It's a chance to escape the four walls of the hospital room for five minutes'

Our virtual reality headset offers ANCHOR patients a welcome distraction.

We've all done it – daydreamed of sunnier climes while looking out the window on a dreich day, or imagined ourselves discovering one of the World's Wonders as we do chores around the house. And now we can offer patients in the ANCHOR Unit an escape as they undergo treatment – thanks to the generous fundraising efforts of a local family. Our new virtual reality (VR) headset offers patients the perfect chance to tune out the hospital setting, with options to explore Egypt and Paris or get up close to wildlife. Wellbeing services coordinator Richard Frew tells us more.

Who can use the VR headset?

Anyone in our inpatient or outpatient departments can have a go, and our volunteer Karen Sedgwick, goes around the wards with the headset, offering patients the chance to use it.



We can also offer the headset to patients who are nervous about undergoing a procedure. We had one lady who was very nervous about needles, so she wore the headset while having a canula inserted. It really helped to distract her.

As well as giving patients a bit of an escape, the VR headset acts as a conversation starter. We've had patients calling across the room to each other 'where did you go this time?' and swapping stories.

Where can patients escape to?

People can explore cities like Paris, New York and Seville, or go further afield and see Egypt, Cambodia or Iceland. There's even a trip through the cosmos!

There's also some very wholesome animal content, like feeding time at the farm, alligator crossings, dolphins underwater or bison at Yellowstone Park.

A lot of the experiences are in 4K definition and feel very real – we often get patients reaching out to pet the animals down at the farm.

What's the response been like so far?

Generally those who have tried the VR headset have enjoyed the escape it offers them. Two or three times people have asked to go to their favourite destination as it brings back happy memories.

We've also had a couple who were meant to be going to Cambodia, but their trip was

put on hold following diagnosis. They were so happy to be able to still see it through the VR headset and it's made them all the more determined to go in the future.

Where did the idea come from?

The headset has been funded thanks to the family of Baillie Dryden, who was just 18 when he diagnosed and needed treatment in the haematology ward.

Baillie's dad Mark embarked on a three-day challenge with friends – taking on the Great Glen Way on their mountain bikes before climbing Ben Nevis. They raised more than £15,000. Once he was well enough, Baillie also took part in the Runway Run for Friends of ANCHOR.

When Baillie was in hospital, he had access to Friends of ANCHOR's games console to escape the goings-on in the ward. That sparked the idea of investing in something a bit different - the VR headset to provide the ultimate distraction.



- Our other chair and bedside services include:**
- Hand and foot massages
 - Reflexology
 - Mini manicures
 - Podiatry
 - Inpatient barber appointments
 - An inpatient listening service

Fundraiser focus

We love celebrating the fantastic efforts of some of our fundraisers in each edition!

This is just a snapshot of what's been happening lately.



Fancy fundraising? We'd love to hear from you.

Pop us an email today and let us know your plans:

info@friendsofanchor.org



£5,580.76
since 2016

Dance Proms

Dance Proms brings together dancers from across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, making it one of the biggest and much-anticipated dance shows in the region.

Since 2016, Friends of ANCHOR has been lucky enough to benefit from the spectacle.

Gail Rose, of Premiere Productions UK – who styles and choreographs our Courage and Brave models – organises the show-stopping event each year.

Held at The Beach Ballroom, last year's event starred 250 dancers – aged 4 to 29 – from 16 dance schools from across the region.

They've all been trained by the best principals, teachers and choreographers, and the show truly is an impressive sight celebrating some of our area's top local talent.

Donations over the four nights are collected for Friends of ANCHOR, with £5,580.76 raised since the inaugural show. A huge thanks to all involved – and the audiences, for giving so generously each year.



£1,321.75
since 2014

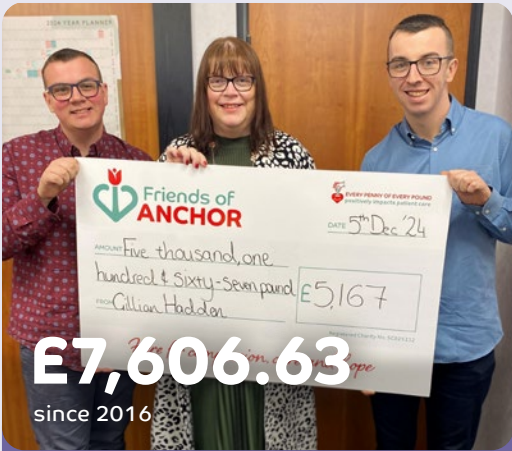
Newtonhill Panto

Feel good family entertainment and festive giving – it's a perfect combination!

The cast and crew behind Newtonhill Panto have generously supported us over the years, proudly displaying the FoA banner and shaking collection buckets at their shows.

Last year's audiences were treated to Sinbad the Sailor, and in between all the usual capers, laughs and general panto fun, kindly donated £302.

This takes the total raised by Centre Stage Theatre Company over the years to £1,321.75. A brilliant effort? Oh yes it is!



£7,606.63
since 2016

Gillian Hadden

From making delicious jams to hosting craft sales and fantastic Christmas wreath making classes, Gillian Hadden is certainly a lady of many talents.

The mum-of-two began fundraising for us back in 2016 after going through the ANCHOR Unit herself and seeing the support on offer to patients. Her first event was a strawberry garden party, and from there she's hosted craft sales, Christmas wreath making sessions and delivered talks for the SWI – and in 2018, she was one of our Courage on the Catwalk stars.

Gillian, who used to run much-loved burger van Big Baps, also used to keep a collection can at the till for her customers, with every penny going towards her fantastic fundraising total.

Most recently, it's been Gillian's delicious jams that have kept donations for FoA piling in – taking her fundraising total to a brilliant £7,606.63. Every jar of jam, every penny in the collection can and every homemade stocking filler really adds up!



£15,306.40
in 2024

Phoenix Theatre

The Phoenix Theatre family supported us throughout 2024, in recognition of the care their beloved director and co-founder Liz Milne received in the ANCHOR Unit.

The local theatre company held a fundraiser as part of a secret mission to name a seat at His Majesty's Theatre in theatre stalwart Liz's honour. The special gesture marked Liz's 73rd birthday, and it was decided that "anything extra" raised would be donated to Friends of ANCHOR as a way of giving back for the care she'd received. Through the generosity of the company and its own supporters, the "extra" amounted to a fantastic £3,158.

Liz's family were comforted that she got to see her seat at His Majesty's Theatre before she sadly died in July.

Through the final stages of her illness, Liz had been hard at work with Phoenix co-founder Clare Haggart, planning the group's next show, Louder Than Words.

Just four months after Liz died, the cast took to the stage for a sold-out run at Aberdeen Arts Centre, performing musical hit after hit. The cast – which includes Liz's children Jonnie and Katie – even took to the stage wearing Friends of ANCHOR T-shirts at one point in the show in a poignant nod to their much-loved director.

Fundraising efforts from the show raised an incredible £12,148.40, taking the theatre company's total for 2024 to £15,306.40. What a legacy for Liz!

*Thank you to ALL our fundraisers
- your support means the world!*

Screening officers make progress on **promoting importance of checks**

Friends of ANCHOR is supporting an effort to improve screening uptake for cervical, bowel and breast cancers.

Can you help spread the word about cancer screening in Grampian?

If so, our Friends of ANCHOR cancer screening officers Charlotte Murray and Chidi Ogwo want to hear from you.

The pair, who work within NHS Grampian's public health directorate, are focusing on improving uptake for cervical, breast and bowel cancer screening in the north-east.

Friends of ANCHOR has funded the first year of the newly-created posts at a cost of £94,000.

Now, thanks to the impressive work the duo has achieved, NHS Grampian will fund one of the posts through its own means - with Friends of ANCHOR continuing to fund the second for a further year, at a cost of £53,000.

Earlier this year, Charlotte and Chidi appealed to community stalwarts, religious leaders and group organisers to help promote the importance of screening and getting checked out.

These community champions help share up-to-date and relevant information within their local network – whether that be among family members, friends, colleagues or groups they attend. They could also set up a stall at a supermarket, or organise an information day at work – it's up to each individual

how they'd best like to help.

As the project gathers pace and Friends of ANCHOR's funding commitment continues, the team is keen to hear from even more potential volunteers who could act as a voice in their community.

Charlotte said: "We know how important trusted voices in the community are, particularly in reaching the under-represented groups.

"It's about getting the information out there and then helping feed back what local communities are saying about the barriers and experiences they're having. We can use that to inform future services and our work moving forward.

"Community champions are essentially a bridge between the community and the NHS and other organisations that can help to drive change."

Over the coming months, Charlotte and Chidi will use lived-experience and community champion feedback to widen their focus and ensure their materials are relevant for communities they're targeting.

"Communicating in the right way, for the right groups, is a very important part of the puzzle," said Charlotte.

"People from different backgrounds, or of different ages, respond in different ways to the information they're presented with – so getting that right, and getting people invested in their own care and health, is vital."

Charlotte and Chidi have developed a bespoke communications plan for cervical screening – which, of the three cancer types they're focused on, has the worst uptake.

Just 26% of women in Aberdeen's more deprived areas attend their cervical screening appointments, compared to 84% elsewhere in the city. Overall, uptake in Grampian is 69% - well below the national target of 80%.

Handheld video brochures have also been created to let people know what they can expect at their screening appointment, and Charlotte and Chidi hope local businesses and organisations will be willing to share the information in their reception or staff areas.

Chidi's work has centred around broadening the scope of the groups where screening information is available. Key focus groups include ethnic minority groups, the Polish community and those



living in areas like Sunnybank, Powis, Froghall, Seaton and Old Aberdeen.

Now he is looking to roll-out more face-to-face talks with breastfeeding mums, people in alcohol support groups and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Training is under way with Healthpoint Advisers at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and Dr Gray's in Elgin, with more planned for pharmacists, learning disability nurses and even library services teams.

Chidi said: "The next few months will be packed with training sessions and learning, and linking up with different groups so we can explore connections and continue overcoming the barriers that deter people from attending screening appointments.

"It's been really encouraging to see the progress we've made so far engaging with these communities, and we're continuing on that trajectory thanks to the funding from Friends of ANCHOR."

If you'd like to find out more about becoming a community champion, or if you think your business or organisation could stock one of the screening team's video brochures, email us: info@friendsofanchor.org



Corporate supporters

Read about the efforts of some of our corporate partners. If you're keen to support through your company, please email info@friendsofanchor.org



GARY WALKER WEALTH MANAGEMENT

Gary Walker Wealth Management (GWWM) named Friends of ANCHOR their chosen charity for 2024, and we're delighted they've continued their support into this year too.

Staff at the firm have thrown their weight behind the cause – taking part in runs, 72-hour golf challenges and even throwing themselves out of a plane for us.

The team organised their own golf day at Hazlehead, and shook buckets for us at their annual family fun day at Pittodrie.

And, when the financial advisers took clients to Gleneagles for their annual golf outing in August, they saw it as the perfect opportunity to drum up more support – even collecting donations for FoA on the bus down!

Friends of ANCHOR is a charity close to many of the team's hearts, with company founder Gary himself recently diagnosed with prostate cancer. Now on the other side of successful treatment, Gary has roped in nine family and friends to take on the Copenhagen Half Marathon with him on September 14.

A week later, eight of the GWWM team will tackle The Beast Race, a 10K muddy obstacle course in Banchory.

The running tees will then be swapped for black tie and ballgowns, as Gary and his family host a charity ball at The Marcliffe, in aid of Friends of ANCHOR and UCAN, to support the SURE Appeal, which we've partnered with UCAN on.

We're so grateful to have the support of the whole GWWM family behind us!



MARKS & SPENCER

The team at M&S Aberdeen City Centre have been long-term supporters of Friends of ANCHOR – not just offering up fundraising opportunities, but by backing two of our biggest events of the year.

Since 2022, M&S has welcomed our Courage on the Catwalk and Brave models into the St Nicholas store for their styling appointments with show choreographers Premiere Productions UK.

The store kindly lends us the model outfits for show weekends, and staff have even volunteered at the event in past years too.

Throughout the years, the team at M&S has hosted our volunteers for various bag packing sessions, raising several thousands of pounds in the process, and proving that every penny really does count.

This February, the team hosted a very special afternoon tea for retired and former colleagues. With the upcoming move to the newly upgraded M&S Union Square, the event was organised to give colleagues old and new the chance to take a trip down memory lane about their time working at the St Nicholas branch. It was also a hugely successful fundraiser for us – with a fantastic £4,630 raised in just one afternoon!

Become a Spotlight Ambassador

Are you enjoying this latest edition of Spotlight?

We're looking for supporters to help us distribute the magazine in their local areas to spread the word about our work further afield!



Aberdeenshire

- Tarland
- Cruden Bay

Moray

- Elgin
- Forres
- Fochabers
- Keith
- Lossiemouth

Shetland

- Haroldswick
- Hillswick
- Lerwick
- Mid Yell
- Sandwick
- Scalloway
- Sumburgh

If you can help in any of the above areas, please email info@friendsofanchor.org



Faithfuls turned traitors: new research into **behaviour** of gut bacteria

A gut organism long-heralded as ‘healthy’ may have acquired traits that have turned it harmful. Friends of ANCHOR is funding a study to find out if that’s the case – and if so, what can be done about it.

Friends of ANCHOR has long supported research into cancer and blood disorders, with millions funded since the charity was founded in 1997.

Part of that commitment is pilot research – vital early-stage studies that allow scientists to test their hypotheses and gather the data needed to build cases for major funding.

Since 2010, thanks to donor support, 87 pilot projects have been funded, with some going on to receive significant funding that’s broken new ground.

This year, we’re funding five more studies to the tune of £67,000 – with areas of focus including male breast cancer, liver cancer and blood cancers.

The work unfolds in laboratories at the University of Aberdeen and with patients receiving treatment from NHS Grampian.



The team

Dr Indrani Mukhopadhyia,
Dr George Ramsay, PhD
students Sam McVey and
Albandari Alzaidi, and lab
technician Alison Richmond

The funding

£14,990 for a 12-month study

The background

The human gut is home to trillions of bacteria that help with digestion, protect against infections and support overall health. We’ve all heard of ‘good gut bugs’, right?

These gut bacteria are also part of the tumour microenvironment, and several studies have confirmed that in people with colorectal cancers, the gut microbiota is altered.

Agathobacter rectalis (*A. rectalis*) is one such gut bug that has shown a change in behaviour. Generally considered a beneficial bacterium, it’s very common in a healthy human gut. Recent research has shown

it could play a more complex role in colorectal cancer though – causing inflammation and a predisposition to cancer in mice studies.

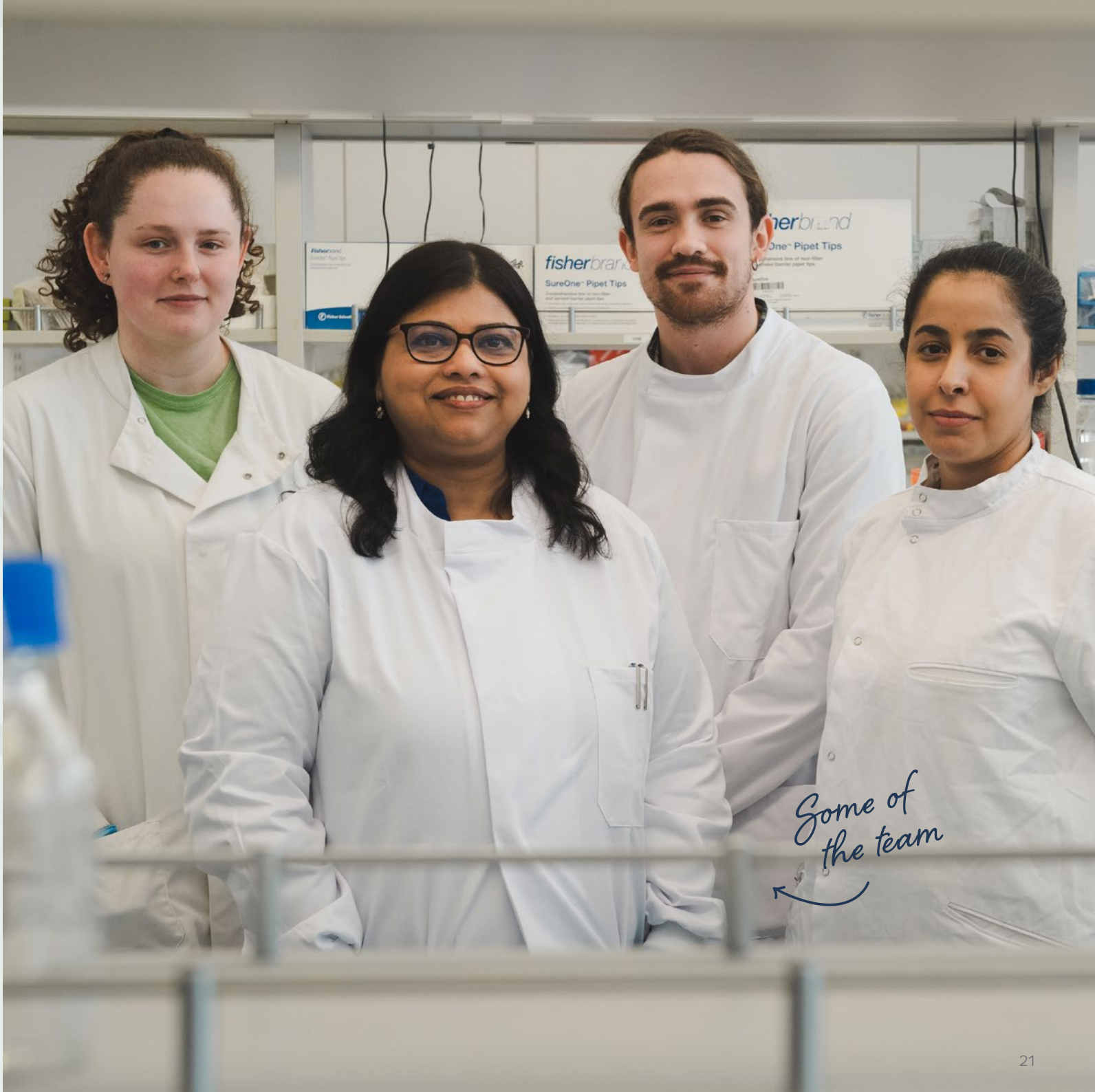
The study

Dr Mukhopadhyia and her team aim to uncover whether *A. rectalis* promotes or protects against tumour formation. Using state-of-the-art techniques, they will isolate the bacteria from a sample of diseased tissue, comparing it with that of healthy individuals.

Using advanced bacterial culture and molecular techniques, the team will investigate how this bacterium interacts with gut epithelial cells and its cross talk with the immune system.

The benefits to future ANCHOR patients

Understanding this relationship is crucial because colorectal cancer is one of the most common cancers worldwide. If research can determine whether *Agathobacter rectalis* contributes to cancer progression, it could open new doors for diagnostics, prevention strategies, and even microbiome-based therapies.



New training tool will **enhance treatment** for cervical cancer patients

The ‘pelvic phantom’ will help radiographers offer more targeted treatment.

Friends of ANCHOR has invested £3,000 in a training tool to improve treatment for cervical cancer patients.

The pelvic phantom – a life-like model – is helping therapeutic radiographers develop their skills in providing a more targeted treatment for brachytherapy patients.



Brachytherapy is a type of internal radiotherapy, and in Aberdeen is prescribed to patients with certain gynecological cancers. It can also be used to treat superficial skin cancers.

By combining the use of brachytherapy internal applicators with needles placed within the tumour or close by, medics can enhance the dose coverage while maintaining acceptable radiation doses to adjacent organs.

This improves patient outcomes and their quality of life – but the process is complex and requires intensive training. Now, thanks to Friends of ANCHOR’s supporters, treatment teams can hone their skills using the pelvic phantom,

a life-like and anatomically accurate training model which simulates the pelvic area of the human body.

It allows staff to practice their skills in applicator and needle placement in the theatre environment.

Brachytherapy lead practitioner Caroline Pacitti made the funding request to ensure NHS Grampian can offer the “gold standard” of care.

Caroline said: “Thanks to this equipment funded by FoA, we can scan, ultrasound and place interstitial needles during training sessions to gain the necessary skills to deliver this treatment for patients.”

“By having our own phantom to work with, we can concentrate on in-house training without the need for staff to take time away from the department to visit other centres across Scotland. It’s a significant benefit to be able to work on our treatment delivery without leaving ARI, preventing potential delay for our patients.”

Caroline added: “It’s great to be able to develop this technique now in Aberdeen.

“Using interstitial needles in combination with standard brachytherapy applicators allows more individual treatment planning and delivery, specific to patient needs. This has shown to improve patient outcomes and future quality of life.”



Friends of ANCHOR funding for the brachytherapy department through the years.

2021
A **£10,000** virtual skylight and **£1,000** for artwork to create a calming atmosphere and serene setting for patients.

2021
Our wellbeing support worker Lisa was hired, with a portion of her time each week dedicated to delivering practical and emotional support for brachytherapy patients.

2018
A **£9,000** contribution towards a portable ultrasound scanner to streamline the treatment process for patients.

Let’s get **specific**

How we’ve supported patients in the last six months, thanks to you:



Patients greeted by our welcome team volunteers



Miles covered by our volunteer drivers



Newspapers delivered daily with a warm hello



Care packs gifted across the treatment pathway



Massage, nail, podiatry and reflexology appointments



Hair cuts by our in-house barber

Here’s what that **support** means to patients...

“I had my nails painted during treatment, and I never thought something so little would make me feel so good. One of my side effects has been nerve damage in my feet and reflexology from Friends of ANCHOR has really helped me with getting some sensation back, as well as the massages helping to relax overall.”

“I actually enjoyed chemo day. You’re just not long feeling better from your last dose, and now you’re getting a good chat with staff and other patients while being offered wee treats like ice lollies, strawberries and cream or a foot massage – you name it! It was never a day I dreaded, thanks to the Friends of ANCHOR team.”

“On the day of my operation for breast cancer I was given a little care pack from Friends of ANCHOR which included a heart-shaped cushion. This has become my most prized possession over the past couple of months. It gives extra support, allowing me to be more comfortable, even when I’m just sitting down. It also allowed me to be chauffeured around when I couldn’t drive, as it gave me added protection from the seatbelt. It’s just brilliant!”

“I love Friends of ANCHOR’s welcome team in the ANCHOR Unit. They are always friendly and happy to chat about any of the services that are on offer. It made me feel at ease and felt very different to other areas of the hospital.”

Help us make a positive difference
every day with compassion,
care and hope.

Thank you.



friendsofanchor.org

Wellbeing team:

wellbeing@friendsofanchor.org
01224 859222

Fundraising team:

info@friendsofanchor.org
01224 859170

Friends of ANCHOR, c/o Balmoral Group Holdings Ltd, Balmoral Park, Loirston, Aberdeen AB12 3GY

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