

Weston Park Cancer Charity Podcast

Episode 2 – Our History

Ruby Osborn: Hello and welcome to the Weston Park Cancer Charity Podcast, sharing stories about our work, what we do and the people we support. From funding life-saving research to providing practical help and emotional support, it's our job to care in every sense for our patients and their families. I'm Ruby and in today's episode I'm talking to Professor Barry Hancock, who has been part of the charity since the very beginning.

Barry Hancock: So my name is Barry Hancock, Emeritus Professor of Oncology in the University at Weston Park Hospital. My role at Weston Park Hospital began way back in 1974 when I was training at that stage to be a cancer physician. Radiotherapy was the mainstay of Weston Park Hospital when I first came. Weston Park Hospital has its origins way back in 1914 just before the start of the First World War when the radium centre was funded by what was then called the Sheffield Radium Fund. Subsequently there was a centre for radiotherapy set up, that was in 1945, and we had one of the first Van der Graaf machines, which was state of the art in 1945 radiotherapy. You could actually put the patient into position, you could aim your radiotherapy at the tumour and treat the tumour without damaging the patient which was great news and we had one of the first.

So eventually they built a hospital called Weston Park Hospital, and that opened in 1970, 50 years ago. Isn't that incredible? So in 1970 in April it was officially opened and started to take in patients. I remember that at that time I was a very young doctor, a houseman in fact, my first year after qualifying. I worked at the old Sheffield Royal Infirmary which was where most of the radiotherapy was done. A lot of it was implants in those days, so radium implants into, for example, cancer of the cervix, was done in the wards at the Royal Infirmary and I remember the razzmatazz because Princess Anne came up to open the new hospital at Weston Park Hospital. I wasn't invited, I wasn't important enough in those days but I remember it, the news, and I thought what an incredible thing to have a new hospital which treats cancer. I didn't know at that stage that four years later I would be part of the staff there and I remained part of the staff there for 45 years. Eventually I was the Professor of Cancer Medicine and lead in cancer research and I was able to set up the charity, the Weston Park Cancer Care and Research Fund, as it was known in those days.

So it's 25 years since the charity was set up, and that was set up to finance care, research and treatment and those three aims have underpinned the whole ethos of the charity over those many years. Our first venture was to try and get a CT scanner planner, one of the first in the country. The idea was that the CT scanner would help position the tumour and then the radiotherapist could aim their rays very accurately at the tumour. It was going to cost us £500,000, which is an awful lot in those days of course and we did it in a few months, so my goodness, there was obviously a need for the charity wasn't there?

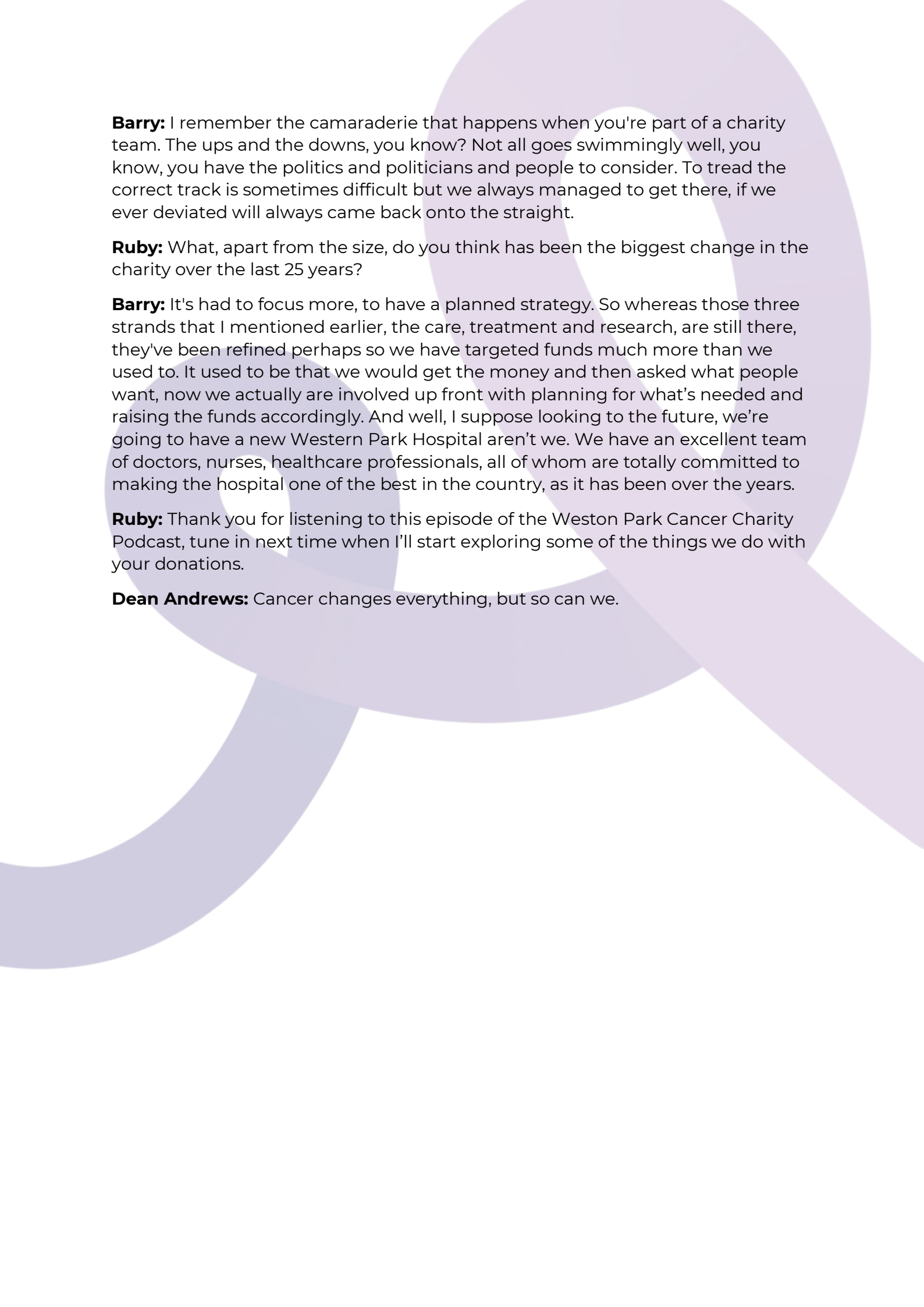
Of course since then it's gone on in leaps and bounds and we've helped set up the Cancer Trials Centre, who have set up pioneering research in clinical cancer. That was set up as a facility to run trials, to see patients on trials and to treat patients on trials. So we for a long time have had one of the best Cancer Clinical Trials Centres in the country. It's now all changed of course and there are different leaders and different people involved but the Cancer Charity is still a major funder of that research. So research has been all the way through a mainstay of the strategy of the cancer charity.

That's not to say that the care and treatment have taken second roles, because we've done an awful lot to improve the standards of care in the hospital. Apart from the various bits of equipment that we bought, we helped set up the Teenage Cancer Unit, the young persons' unit, off one of the wards at the hospital, which was again pioneering, one of the first in the country. I think the other thing is that we've been major contributors to the refurbishment, that's not quite the right word, almost the rebuilding of the wards, the chemotherapy suite, the various wards that look after the patients. We financed the Cancer Support and Information Centre which, in its infancy, back in 1980 when that charity was first set up, that was aimed at financing the care and the building that went with it, to look after day care patients. patients who had had rough effects from the radiotherapy. It changed to be the Cancer Information and Support Centre, Cancer Support Centre as it is now and all the way through the Cancer Charity has supported that, even though the Cancer Support Centre was a charity in its own right, we didn't raise funds, we relied on the Cancer Charity itself, Weston Park Hospital Cancer Charity, to make sure that we could staff and run the unit. That of course now has become part of, an integral part or, the cancer charity, not a separate charity.

Ruby: What sort of fundraising were you doing back in the early days? Were you having events? Was it someone out with a bucket?

Barry: Well you'll be interested but it was a matter of cross dressing I'm afraid. There were three of us who participated in charitable fundraising events dressed, how can I say it, well, Tina Turner doesn't have anything on it. We all looked absolutely magnificent in our wigs and our wondrous dresses. I remember the first appeal was called 'The Professor Scanner Appeal' and the professor of course was me. I can remember the badges and the little models that were made. It was all a little bit, doesn't sound very professional these days, but it worked and people liked the idea of somebody who was there and was an image and a figure that they could perhaps admire and at the same time poke fun at, that sort of thing. We also took part in various sporting activities, so obstacle races and things like that, and also at that time a lot of going out to talk to people. Which of course is what it's still all about. It's about making friendships with the people that are going to give money. Quite often that's patients and families, equally often it's big business, corporate organisations, who have been wonderfully generous over the years.

Ruby: What are some of your favourite memories from the last 25 years of the charity?



Barry: I remember the camaraderie that happens when you're part of a charity team. The ups and the downs, you know? Not all goes swimmingly well, you know, you have the politics and politicians and people to consider. To tread the correct track is sometimes difficult but we always managed to get there, if we ever deviated will always come back onto the straight.

Ruby: What, apart from the size, do you think has been the biggest change in the charity over the last 25 years?

Barry: It's had to focus more, to have a planned strategy. So whereas those three strands that I mentioned earlier, the care, treatment and research, are still there, they've been refined perhaps so we have targeted funds much more than we used to. It used to be that we would get the money and then asked what people want, now we actually are involved up front with planning for what's needed and raising the funds accordingly. And well, I suppose looking to the future, we're going to have a new Western Park Hospital aren't we. We have an excellent team of doctors, nurses, healthcare professionals, all of whom are totally committed to making the hospital one of the best in the country, as it has been over the years.

Ruby: Thank you for listening to this episode of the Weston Park Cancer Charity Podcast, tune in next time when I'll start exploring some of the things we do with your donations.

Dean Andrews: Cancer changes everything, but so can we.