The Opening of the Sarah Walters Suite

Home of the Cochrane Cystic Fibrosis and Genetic Disorders Review Group

On Monday 11th February we were pleased to welcome friends of the Group, including the Chief Medical Officer Dame Professor Sally Davies, Professor Rosalind Smyth CBE, and Professor Deborah Ashby OBE, to join some UK-based members of the CFGD Editorial Board at the official opening of the new Cochrane office in the Institute in the Park at Alder Hey Children’s Hospital in Liverpool. The office has been named the Sarah Walters Suite in memory of Dr Sarah Walters who sadly passed away last year. Along with Professor Rosalind Smyth, Dr Sarah Walters was one of the founding editors of the group in 1995 and herself authored several Cochrane Reviews and commented on many more.

Dr Sarah Walters was a remarkable and dedicated woman, full of energy and an inspiration to many. Aged 10, she was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis (CF); this was at a time when the life expectancy of patients with cystic fibrosis did not extend much beyond teenage years. She was determined to study medicine and after having been turned down by several medical schools due to her condition, she studied microbiology and graduated with a first! After this she persuaded St. George’s Hospital Medical School to accept her as a medical student and graduated in 1985 with distinction – the first person with CF to become a doctor. Having held a number of clinical posts in London, she moved to Birmingham and specialised in public health medicine undertaking research into care for specialist medical conditions including CF. She was a senior lecturer in public health and epidemiology at the University of Birmingham and served on government advisory committees. She was also an advisor to the UK CF Trust on research and a number of specialist working groups. She was always keen to speak to parents of children with CF and to encourage them to follow their dreams, as she had. After developing and leading the masters in public health degree course at Birmingham for 10 years, she retired in 2006. Outside of medicine she was a keen sportswoman; she played cricket for Surrey and football at university before taking up activities such as Tae Kwan Do, skiing and Nordic walking and qualifying as both a ski and a fitness instructor. She was a musician (having played in a rock band), a linguist (fluent in French and Russian) and a motorbike enthusiast - which led to the founding of a company with her husband Stephen to manufacture security devices initially for motorbikes. After her retirement, Sarah and Stephen purchased [Alvecote Wood](http://www.alvecotewood.co.uk) which they managed for wildlife groups and the community and for which they won an award in 2014. Sarah took a professional photography course and took many photographs of her beloved woods, teaching others the art of photography there as well.

Sarah was once asked how she would like to be remembered; her reply was as someone who made a difference to both the lives of people and the planet. We therefore thought it fitting to name the new office of the Cochrane Cystic Fibrosis and Genetic Disorders Group in her memory and invited her husband Stephen to officially open it. It is a mark of the esteem in which Sarah was held that the attendees travelled from across the UK and included not only members of the current Editorial Board and the Senior and Associate Editors of the Cochrane Children’s and Families Network, but also former editors with the Group (Dame Professor Sally Davies, Professor Rosalind Smyth and Professor Deborah Ashby) and leading figures from the Alder Hey Children’s NHS Foundation Trust, the Medicines for Children Network and Liverpool University. Sarah’s name lives on in this facility and she will continue to make a difference to many lives for years to come.