

Convalescing at Brian Lewis House – John’s story

“The NHS has sent you home too early” my GP told me, “actually what happened is that they needed your bed for an emergency case”. Anyway, my very good friend Joanna, a former nursing sister of several years standing, agreed with my GP that the NHS had indeed sent me home too early. During her first visit to my home after the Open Heart operation, she told me directly “you are not in a fit state to be left in your house alone. What you need is a period of convalescence”. She continued “how would you like to have all your meals cooked for you, all your shopping done for you. In fact, how would you like to be able to spend all your time just concentrating on recovering”. I readily agreed. Joanna, because of her expertise in caring for patients, already had some knowledge of possible places. She researched the situation extensively, eventually telephoning to say that she had found the most suitable place for me. It was Brian Lewis House in Oxford – an Abbeyfield residential home - and, moreover, it was just 15 minutes away from my own home. All that remained for me to do was pack a bag and be driven down the road - to rest and recover!



THE STAFF: includes our beloved Chaowadee who has been House Manager here for 7 years. Her job is to look after the needs of the residents, the half-a-dozen or so staff, the administrator, the trustees and other volunteers – as well as managing the day-to-day running of the House. One of the volunteers, a professional computer man with over 15 years’ service with a large international company, pays regular visits to sort out any glitches we residents have with our computing. Another volunteer comes and makes a threesome with me so that Katie can play her beloved Scrabble.

RESIDENTS: are four ladies and five men. We nine are all mature and cooperative, and grateful for the comparatively peaceful and stress-free lives we can lead – at least compared to days of yore.

ENTERTAINMENT: we have occasional speakers who come and give presentations to us; we have recently listened to (and, being a lively audience, quizzed) Oxford's Town Crier, as well as other speakers that residents requested, who have given talks of a theological or scientific nature. We also have monthly coffee mornings, cinema and theatre visits, various outings, and Christmas, birthday and garden parties. We enjoy a wide variety of entertainment, and are currently negotiating with a husband-and-wife duo, who sing songs from popular musicals.

MEAL-TIMES: Breakfast has the longest time-span of any of our three meals. Early risers begin pouring their cereals, making their toast and marmalade, and drinking their coffee, tea and orange juice from around 6-ish. Later risers, such as me, bring up the rear towards 9-ish. Of course we help ourselves to a hot drink whenever the inclination comes over us during the day. (My Cardiac Rehab Coach instructs me: “John, you haven't drunk any water

the whole of this two-hour session. No wonder your blood-pressure is down. Remember, please - next session, a bottle of water to drink to keep that blood pressure up!")

MEALS: Breakfast of course, in this 21st century, is a self-service affair. Lunch, at 12.45 is the hot meal of the day, being a main course, often with three vegetables, dessert and coffee or tea. Supper at 6 o'clock is of the "high tea" variety with plenty of mixed sandwiches, yoghurts, salad of the cucumber and radish type, fruit salad, cheese and biscuits, cakes, grapes – and, to give variety, there might be bacon and egg, eggs on waffle and that kind of thing served hot.

RESULTS FROM MY 2 MONTH CONVALESCENCE: Lethargy was my natural state before Open Heart Surgery. When the heart isn't pumping sufficient oxygen around the body, well, you're not going to be jumping around like a two-year old. Now, my physical state is one of fairly energetic joie-de-vivre. Mind you, this does not come about by sitting down passively all day long. Physical movement – at a sensible level but with an increased energy level each day – is the purpose of the 10-week Cardiac Rehab Course. This is the only way to get that muscle, the heart, beginning to perform as it used to.

LASTING EFFECTS OF MY STAY: No man – or woman - is an island; we all need one another. Being with other people stimulates the body to be more awake and alert; engaging in conversations around the dining table gives one the conscious feeling that those brain cells are being used instead of atrophied. Also the memory can be brought into play remembering those pertinent aspects of one's life and experience which can contribute to that conversation. It is noticeable that even the comparatively quiet residents, who do more listening than talking, say that "one of the good points about living here is just being with other people". Let us socialise then – and as a very last point – let us exercise our joints AND our brains. Just jotting down the key-words of the major events of the day keeps those synapses working! Oh, there is one other change to my life that Ab-Ox, as I call it, has converted me to – I shall reverse my hot meal of the day to 1-ish and my High Tea, Ab-Ox style, to 7-ish. No longer will my hot meal of the day be finished in time for the late evening news at 10, (and keep this to yourself – at home, my dishes didn't get washed up until morning). We can all learn from each other. Thank you, Ab-Ox for my improved health and changed life-style.