

In the aftermath of the election, on May 7th, health care professionals across the UK, were involved in initiatives to increase awareness of heart failure, as part of the first European Heart Failure Awareness Day. At the Whittington staff were joined by colleagues from Islington to promote an understanding of heart failure which occurs when the heart muscle isn't functioning normally. It can occur at any age, increases with age, and typically affects 1% of those aged 50 to 59 rising to 10% of those aged 80-89 years. Symptoms which include shortness of breath and swollen legs, are often ignored. The diagnosis can be difficult. The condition carries a substantial risk of death, but with earlier diagnosis and appropriate treatment symptoms can be transformed and the outlook improved.

Heart failure services at the Whittington and the local communities have been steadily evolving and improving over the last 10-15 years. From the outset we were keen to ensure high quality care for all, both those treated from home and those who required hospital admission. The HF team has been awarded funding through the Health Improvement Program and the joint DOH/BHF research initiatives to develop and assess innovative patterns of heart failure care. Our strategies and data assessing outcomes, have been very exciting and improved local care. The models of care we pioneered, have attracted interest, influenced practice across the UK and beyond and contributed to the Customer Service Excellence Award made to our Cardiovascular Services in 2009.

The European Heart Failure Awareness Day is a new initiative this year, developed with colleagues interested in Heart Failure from across Europe, working with the Heart Failure Association of the European Society of Cardiology, through the Committee of the National Societies of Heart Failure. People who think they might have heart failure should talk to their GP (but might also find www.heartfailurematters.org useful). Unusually for the UK, a simple blood test (Natriuretic peptide) is available for use by all local general practitioners. This either excludes heart failure or suggests further specialist input is needed, such as through the Whittington Rapid Access Heart Function Clinic. Optimum care for people with heart failure involves multidisciplinary working and with closer alignment of services across Haringey, Islington and the Whittington alongside discussions around "Integrated or Vertical Care Models" we anticipate earlier detection and better care for people with heart failure.