

Claire Stevens, Chief Executive, VHS

Welcome and overview of Valuing and Sustaining Volunteering in Health

1. Good morning and a very warm welcome from me on behalf of VHS.
2. For those of you who aren't familiar with VHS, we are the national network and intermediary for Scotland's health charities and other voluntary and third sector organisations with an active involvement in health.
3. We are a registered charity with a membership base of over 400 organisations and individuals, ranging from national charities like Cancer Support Scotland and Royal Voluntary Service through to local organisations like Inverclyde Community Development Trust and Volunteer Midlothian.
4. We work within and across sectors to strengthen understanding, collaboration and action to tackle health inequalities and improve people's health and wellbeing.
5. That is why today's conference is focused on networking, knowledge exchange, sharing and learning, as we try to identify where there is common ground and scope for the further development of volunteering in health.
6. Volunteerism and health have a rich history, traceable in the UK at least back to medieval times, when there was a strong association between religion and ministrations to the poor and sick and the establishment of voluntary hospitals, the first of which in Scotland was Edinburgh's Royal Infirmary, founded in 1729.
7. More recognisably today, we have volunteering in hospitals, hospices, general practices, care homes and communities. Last weekend I read the King's Fund report on the views of NHS staff in England on the role of volunteers, and was struck by the fact that two thirds of the staff interviewed said that *bringing human kindness into busy hospital life* was one of their volunteers' most valued contributions, so perhaps the distance between today's volunteers and their medieval counterparts isn't so great after all.
8. But today, volunteers in health carry out an enormous range of roles like welcoming and guiding people round hospitals, providing companionship for patients without visitors, bringing music and arts activities into wards, providing peer support for breast feeding, running helplines for people who need emotional or practical support, and providing complementary therapies to cancer patients – to name just a few of the very many roles that exist all over Scotland. Matthew Linning's presentation this morning is set to give us a first rate insight into recent Scottish evidence about the relationship between volunteering and health and wellbeing, taking us through some of the challenges as well as the benefits.
9. The formal development of volunteering in NHS Scotland can be traced back to 1970. Successive administrations in Scotland have supported the development of voluntary services within the NHS, in particular the direct engagement of volunteers by the NHS itself. You will hear more about this from Alan Bigham shortly.

10. In parallel with the NHS's own development of volunteering policies and volunteer roles in Scotland, charities and other voluntary organisations have continued the long tradition of engaging their own volunteers to help in hospitals, hospices and the wider community.
11. One look around the room today or at the delegate list is enough to demonstrate just how wide ranging the interest and involvement in volunteering in health is and this afternoon's parallel sessions are an opportunity to find out more about some specific third sector and NHS approaches to volunteering.
12. Back in 2015, the publication of Kate Lampard's Report for the Department of Health focused attention on lessons learned as a result of the deployment of Jimmy Savile as a volunteer in a number of hospitals in England. The report was the catalyst for the National Group on Volunteering in NHS Scotland to look at whether it had implications for volunteering in NHS settings in Scotland.
13. VHS is a member of the National Group and we went on to develop a collaborative project designed to support safe, effective and person centred volunteering in NHS settings, with the focus on volunteers recruited and managed by third sector organisations.
14. The Clear Pathway project resulted in us co-producing guidance and case studies with the National Group and other partners. We published the guidance in April last year and it was distributed to every health board Chair and Chief Executive by the Scottish Government's Healthcare Quality and Improvement Directorate.
15. The Clear Pathway guidance is designed to support NHS and the third sector to work better together to ensure that indirect volunteering in NHS is as beneficial to patients, staff and volunteers as it can be. We hope that the session immediately before lunch time will build on the ethos of the guidance as we invite you to pool your experience and ideas at your tables in a discussion about how and why we value volunteers in our own work and what more we can do.
16. Today's conference is very much the next stage in our Clear Pathway journey, and we hope that the day will provide a useful space for listening, fostering new relationships, exploring challenges and issues, and raising the profile of volunteering in health. After and beyond the conference, we will be embarking on an evaluation of the Clear Pathway guidance, to see how it has landed with health boards and whether it is helping to foster improvement and new developments.
17. I hope this introduction has whetted your appetite for the day, thank you for coming, enjoy the conference, make the most of your time here - and please do stay right to the end so that you can hear what Joe Fitzpatrick, Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing has to say to us.