

A Chief Cardiac Physiologist's Story of Achievement and Change

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Diagnostic Cardiology at the West Suffolk Hospital

I am a Chief Cardiac Physiologist specialising in Cardiac Rhythm Management (CRM) at the West Suffolk Hospital in Bury St Edmunds – the heart of the Suffolk countryside. Previously I worked at The Barts Heart Centre in London where I developed my CRM and EP skills. Leaving The Barts Heart Centre was a difficult choice as I loved it there, but life for me had changed and an unusual but exciting opportunity presented itself at the West Suffolk Hospital. The opportunity to set up a Cardiac Catherterisation Lab (Cath Lab) and cardiac device implant and follow-up service was a project I could not pass up! The Cardiology team at the West Suffolk Hospital were welcoming, friendly, ambitious, driven, passionate and open to new ideas – we were all on the same page!

Three years have passed and, in that time, Cardiology as a team have achieved so much. We have a brand-new Cardiac Centre made up of a state-of-the-art Cath Lab and recovery area, the Cardiac Ward with incorporated Coronary Care Unit, Diagnostic Cardiology Department, Cardiac Nurse Specialists, Cardiology doctors as well as the unit's admin staff all in one place. Centralising Cardiology services has had made such a difference to the working and efficiency of the team. Ultimately this has a positive impact on our patients and the care they receive. Providing CRM services to local patients has meant that they no longer need to travel to the local Tertiary centre for implant of or routine follow-up of their pacemaker or ILR. Diagnostic angiography waiting times have decreased owing to greater capacity – previously angiography was carried out just once a week on a lorry! Support for surgical patients with devices and inpatient device checks are considerably easier and timelier.

Setting up an invasive service from scratch was daunting, but I love a challenge. Developing good working relationships with various staff groups both locally and at other hospitals really helped in getting things up and running. Sharing ideas and working to develop new pathways and processes was rewarding and has led to the evolution of a service which I and the Cardiology team are very proud of. But it won't stop here. The potential to develop further, to offer more services, to increase our skill set as Cardiac Scientists is vast and I love the discussions we have amongst the team about these. We all share the same passion for patient centred care, and I cannot wait to see how our vision grows. This project has helped me to develop and learn new skills around leadership and management which I look forward to improving further in my role as Deputy Head of Department and Invasive Lead in the Diagnostic Cardiology Team.



Photograph kindly donated by the my WISH charity team at the West Suffolk Hospital who helped to raise £500,000 through the Every Heart Matters Appeal to allow the Diagnostic Cardiology Unit to be built within the Cardiac Centre.

The Diagnostic Cardiology Team is led by our Principal Cardiac Physiologist, Alex Pearce. As a department we have supported by STP and PTP students for several years, having these new services makes access to training in these areas much easier. We also have supported several trainees via different routes. Due to varied backgrounds, we developed our own internal training programmes for all our new services. A comprehensive Echocardiography training program developed by Alex and his team was already in place to support trainees working up to their British Society of Echocardiography qualification. The departments Cardiology Perceptorship program has helped support newly qualified PTP students and other trainees. Due to the shortage of Cardiac Physiologists nationally, the training programmes here at the West Suffolk Hospital have been crucial in supporting the success of our services.

As for all departments across the country, Covid has made us change the way in which we work. It was a steep learning curve, but we have embraced various changes and are continuing with remote follow-up for ILR patients and offering all new implanted pacemakers and CRT-P patients home monitoring. The local CRT-P implant service was started during Covid and looks set to continue. We are continuing with more 'one stop' visits, incorporating all diagnostic tests where possible on one day prior to Consultant appointments. The benefits to both the patient, the hospital and the environment are undeniable – without Covid, these changes and service developments may have taken years to embrace.

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