

HE ♥ RT

The **RMBF** Newsletter

Supporting doctors through Covid-19 and beyond

The winter resurgence of coronavirus took a heavy toll on NHS workers still recovering from the first wave.

However, thanks to the wonderful generosity of you, our supporters, the RMBF has already been able to help significant numbers of doctors affected directly by Covid-19. And at meetings of our Grants & Awards Committee, we have sadly seen the wide variety of ways in which this pandemic has caused hardship.

We have helped doctors and medical students who have had to shield because of health conditions, or to protect family members who are similarly vulnerable. The need for extra childcare due to school closures has left many families with a gaping hole in their household budget. And tragically too many have lost loved ones to Covid, having to try and work to make ends meet while still dealing with their grief.

“There really aren’t any words for how much you have helped me,” one beneficiary told us. “I will be forever be grateful that I was signposted to you in what has been the most difficult time in my life.” Another, a medical student, told us how important the RMBF’s help had been to them. “I have passed my finals and am on track to graduate and



start work this summer. I cannot put into words how much of a difference the support has made to alleviate the stresses of this year.”

As well as all our individual supporters, we are very grateful to organisations who have contributed funding to help us offer targeted support to those affected by the pandemic. The Covid-19 Healthcare Support Appeal, the Healthcare Workers’ Foundation (formerly HEROES) and BMA Giving have helped us provide over £75,000 in financial support so far. Thank you also to our longstanding supporters Wesleyan, who contributed a special £5,000 donation, and MDU, who are donating half of FY1 subscription fees this year to RMBF and the Doctors’ Support Network.

Our sincerest thanks to everyone who has helped us support doctors, medical students and their families during this incredibly difficult year – this simply would not be possible without you.

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CEO update

Steve Crone | RMBF Chief Executive

It has been an intensely long and difficult winter for the medical profession, and a struggle for us all in different ways. I am so grateful to all the doctors and health workers saving lives in such tough conditions, and my thoughts are with everyone who has suffered hardship in the coronavirus pandemic, whatever form that has taken.

We are finally beginning to see things change for the better though, and in such times it is healthy to embrace the positives. Thanks to the incredible efforts of NHS staff and volunteers, the vaccination rollout has been a success, and we can finally look forward with cautious optimism to a summer spent reconnecting with family and friends.

We know that there will be a long tail to this virus, and its impact on the mental and physical health of doctors will be felt for a long time yet. But whatever happens, the RMBF will still be here as a safety net for the profession, and we will continue our work to expand and improve our levels of support.

DocHealth update

Over the course of a little less than five years, DocHealth has supported over 1,000 doctors with confidential psychotherapy on a self-referral basis. Even before the pandemic, it was clear from the numbers referring that a service like this was sorely needed, and we are proud to have worked with the BMA to launch and support this project.

We are already putting plans into place to ensure the service can meet demand in the wake of the pandemic, as well as exploring how we can increase the accessibility of face-to-face sessions once it is safe to do so.

Work and wellbeing

I have been pleased to see a positive reception for our new online wellbeing resource launched in June, provided by Rightsteps. If you're finding things tough, then please do have a look at

the range of help it offers. There are bite-size sessions if you're short on time, but you can also access more in-depth, self-guided courses of support. Visit rightsteps.co.uk/customers/rmbf to see what help is available.

We're also close to the launch of our new back-to-work resource, designed to help doctors who are returning to medical practice after a period of absence. We know this is a much-needed area of support, and we're excited to launch what will be a very helpful and timely guide for doctors. Do watch this space – or you can keep an eye on our social media channels for updates.

Vital volunteers

I'd like to recognise the contribution of our tireless volunteers, many of whom are working doctors, and have been doing their bit for the RMBF while facing the pandemic head-on. The things our volunteers do – whether telling medical colleagues about the support we offer, raising vital funds, or supporting our isolated beneficiaries – are particularly needed at the moment. It's wonderful to see that new volunteers continue to join up even in difficult times; a warm welcome to all our new recruits.

One thing to look forward to, for new and long-standing volunteers alike, is our forthcoming series of Volunteer "Roadshows". As the name suggests, these were planned as in-person events around the country, but the first few at least will be held online. They'll offer a chance to refresh your RMBF knowledge, share ideas and best practice, and network with your fellow volunteers.



I'm always struck by the positive and productive energy of our volunteer events, and I'm sure these Roadshows will be no exception.

Some thank yous

One thing that gives me hope this year is how you, our supporters, have enabled us to look after those who have really been hit hard by the pandemic. From the moment we launched our urgent Covid-19 appeal back in April, your generosity in donations, resourceful lockdown fundraising, and messages of support have given us heart. But more importantly, your support has ensured that there was no disruption to the help we can offer: both to our existing beneficiaries, and the many new applicants who continue to be affected by the impact of Covid-19.

And I'm grateful that your generous support has continued as conditions have remained difficult. Thank you for welcoming our new President, Professor Sheila the Baroness Hollins, with such a warm response to her first President's Appeal, raising over £93,000 and counting. You can get to know Sheila a little better on page 6 of this issue.

Finally, a word of thanks to our committed staff team, who adjusted quickly to remote working and have worked hard to deliver vital support to doctors, medical students and families over the year. I am looking forward to seeing everyone in person again – for the first time, in the case of some of our newer colleagues!

With all good wishes
Steve

Case study: Dr Buckle's story

An RMBF beneficiary on how we helped during Covid-19

Dr Conrad Buckle is a consultant in emergency medicine, and was working as a locum when the Covid-19 pandemic reached the UK. A health condition diagnosed the previous year meant that he had to shield for his own safety, severely hampering his ability to work. Fortunately, in lean times, the RMBF were able to help.

"2019 had been a difficult year because of my health. I'd finished a one-year, fixed-term contract at the end of the previous year, and early in 2019 I was looking for jobs. That was when I fell ill. After a series of investigative procedures I was diagnosed with a rare chronic lung disease. During all that time, I was too ill to work for prolonged periods. I had some savings, but the stretch of time off work exhausted them. I was in a precarious position.

My health improved a bit, and though I was still managing my condition, I secured a number of short-term locum roles. One job that I started in early 2020 was going well, and I was optimistic that it might turn into a permanent full-time position.

When Covid-19 reached the UK, I was assessed as clinically extremely vulnerable, partly because I had to use steroids for my lung condition. I would have to shield. Of course, that was a huge personal setback. And the timing couldn't have been worse work-wise:

because I wasn't on a permanent contract, I wasn't eligible for furlough.

From April onwards, I had no income from work, and little in the way of savings to fall back on, because my illness had limited how much I could work. Finding a way to support myself while shielding was difficult, and it took time. I'm a member of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, and I got in touch with them for support.

They suggested contacting the RMBF, so in the summer I filled out an application. They were able to help with my living expenses, tiding me over until I could finally secure work with NHS 111 in October. Just a little bit of help to bridge that gap made all the difference.

It's very tough shielding on your own. Apart from a couple of emergency visits from my sister, to safely drop off some home cooking, I haven't seen my family since April 2020, a year ago now. A lot of people think of shielding as something that just applies to older people, but I'm 58 and fairly fit. The awful thing

"Just a little bit of help to bridge that gap made all the difference."



about this pandemic is that it can cause unexpected hardship in so many ways, and it really could happen to anybody.

For NHS 111, I'm using my experience as an emergency physician to assess patients waiting for possible ambulance transport, trying to reduce hospital admissions at this horribly stretched time. It's satisfying and engaging, but sadly what was supposed to be a full-time, six-month remote working contract was cut back after two months to my current bank-worker status shift work, which is by definition ad hoc, and doesn't provide job security. It's been hard to cope with so much uncertainty in my working life – after a lifetime of what would be classed as a 'steady job'.

I'm glad to say that things are OK for the time being, and I've got enough to get by while I look for a long-term job. It's difficult: the advice for extremely vulnerable people is still to work remotely, and a lot of jobs can't fully offer that yet. At the moment though, I'm facilitating an online clinical leadership programme for emergency medicine doctors based in Ghana, West Africa, which is a new experience and it's been great. I think after the pandemic, medical careers might look quite different from the 'choose a specialty, job for life' model. I'd advise younger doctors to think twice before putting all their eggs in one basket.

Even though the future still looks uncertain, I'm reassured to know that the RMBF will be there for me, and for the profession, in times of hardship. The help they offered me was invaluable, and I'm very grateful."

With thanks to Dr Buckle for sharing his story and the use of his real name



Fantastic fundraisers

From the very first days of the Covid-19 pandemic, when it became starkly clear how serious its impact would be on the medical profession, the outpouring of support for doctors and other healthcare workers has been heartening. Throughout the past year, we have been very fortunate to have the support of many dedicated and innovative fundraisers, working around the limitations of lockdown and social distancing to encourage vital donations that will help doctors when they need it most. Read on to meet our most recent fundraising superstars!

Leo's marathon week

Last year, more than 200 walkers, runners and cyclists came together to raise vital funds for the RMBF in memory of their friend Oattie, who was training to be a doctor when she died unexpectedly.

One of those involved was Leo Wood, who is currently studying medicine at the University of Bristol. Since the first lockdown last year, Leo has made the most of his daily exercise time, building his running stamina from "the odd short plod" up to a truly ambitious target: running seven full marathons in seven days.



Above: Leo with Oattie, who has helped inspire support for doctors. Right: taking the scenic route while training

Leo found that his daily excursions on the trails helped him reflect on how lucky he feels to be physically well and able to get out and run. Wanting to use that good fortune to help others, Leo conceived the week-long, 183-mile challenge, which he completed at the end of March, raising funds for RMBF and the Global Snakebite Initiative.

After initially setting a fundraising target of £2,500, Leo said he felt "absolutely flabbergasted" to reach the total in less than a day. All in all, his marathon efforts have now raised over £10,000 for his chosen causes. As well as contributing donations, friends also joined him for stretches of the run, providing socially-distanced encouragement.



"She was so vivacious, and made the most of every opportunity that came her way," Leo said of Oattie, noting how she has inspired so much togetherness and positivity in her friends' fundraising activities. Our warmest thanks and hearty congratulations to Leo – an incredible achievement.

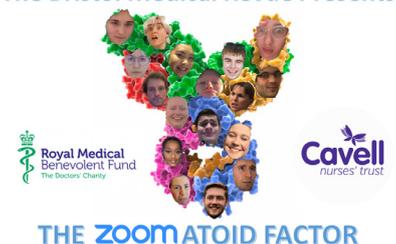
Funny for the money

Staying in Bristol, March also saw medical students use their comedic talents to support medics under pressure. The Bristol Medical Revue is an annual sketch show about the trials and tribulations of studying medicine.

Unsurprisingly, this year's edition had to be performed via Zoom, but the committed cast, drawn from all years of study from 1st to 5th, didn't let social distancing stop the show.



The Bristol Medical Revue Presents...



THE ZOOMATOID FACTOR

New for 2021: giving made quick and easy with QR codes

Donating to doctors in need has never been easier.

If you've got a smartphone, QR codes let you scan and donate in a matter of seconds – and they can also be a big help if you're organising your own fundraiser.



How to scan & donate

Open the camera app on an iPhone, Android or Windows smartphone, and point it at the code to the right. Then just tap the prompt that comes up to go straight to our online donation form. *(Thank you!)*

QR giving for fundraisers

Whether you're running, baking or quizzing for the RMBF, online or in person, a QR code makes it easy for your supporters to donate – and it can automatically track donations, so we'll know to add them to your total! No technical expertise is needed. Just email the team on info@rmbf.org and they'll send you a custom QR code, ready to include on your poster, email invite or social media post.

Promising “brilliant impressions, hilarious jokes and probably technical hitches” the show offered a mix of live sketches and pre-recorded films. “It went incredibly! I’ve had lots of great feedback and hopefully it made people smile,” said Flo Lenehan, a performer and organiser of the night. Ticket sales were brisk, with more than 150 individuals and groups in attendance – and the show raised over £1,100 for the RMBF and the Cavell Nurses’ Trust. Our thanks to all the performers and everyone who attended!



Saying yes to yoga

With its range of physical and mental health benefits, it’s no surprise that yoga has been a tonic for many people this year. Torzi (*pictured above*), a theology student at Edinburgh, took the opportunity during lockdown to qualify as a yoga instructor, and used proceeds from her online classes to support good causes.

When the second wave of the pandemic hit, Torzi wanted to find an impactful charity for doctors, and found the RMBF through her contacts at Imperial College Medical School. “The classes have a positive personal impact on our wellbeing, as well as a collective impact towards supporting our doctors,” said Torzi.

Her series of sessions supporting the RMBF, accessible to all levels, were a hit with attendees and raised over £400 for the charity. Huge thanks to Torzi for her flexible fundraising!



Quiz nights a brain-teasing success

In the autumn, many supporters got involved with our Big Quiz for Medics, pitting your wits against faraway friends and family for a good cause.

In Sheffield, actor Kate Rutter (*pictured above*) and lecturer Mike Beaken had drinks and nibbles at the ready for a (fiercely competitive!) evening quiz with close friends.

The RMBF’s South Warwickshire Guild also took part, holding a quiz to replace their annual coffee and mince pies morning. It proved a great fundraising success, as well as maintaining the social benefits of being in a local Guild during times of lockdown.

Elizabeth Tohill has helped keep a family tradition alive by supporting the RMBF – her mother was a Guild committee member in Streatham, and Elizabeth was involved in the Uxbridge Guild. She shared with us some of the reasons she is keen to help at this crucial time.

“When I retired from the NHS in 2000, having been a consultant clinical oncologist for 25 years, I quickly got involved in many activities including serving as a committee member of the RMBF Uxbridge Guild,” said Elizabeth. “We organised barbecues, plant sales, Christmas parties and the like. Sadly it is no longer active but I’ve continued to support with an annual donation – when you suggested that a quiz would be fun it seemed a good idea to organise.

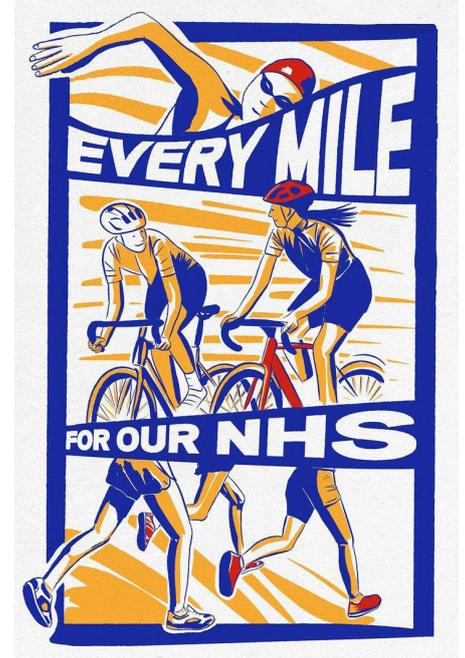
“I am very well aware what an awful time the medical profession is having at the moment, and I hope the RMBF is managing to help as many as possible.”

Our sincere thanks to all our brilliant brainiac quizzers, who between them raised nearly £2,000 for doctors in need!

Every Mile: students to team up across UK

May is set to be the month of a national medical student fundraiser, supporting the RMBF, the Cavell Nurses’ Trust, and Doctors in Distress. Every Mile for Our NHS is an inclusive grassroots fundraiser, with students at all UK medical schools welcome.

However far and whatever the method – walking, swimming, dancing, or even unicycling – every mile will count towards the nationwide total. The team is already recruiting university leads to co-ordinate the fundraising effort at each school, meaning participants will have a supportive local team on their side offering moral support and fundraising expertise.



This is a brilliant chance to meet new people after a difficult and disrupted year of medical study – and all in support of a good cause. Visit linktr.ee/EveryMileForOurNHS or scan the QR code to find out more.



Meet the RMBF's new President

Professor Sheila the Baroness Hollins is Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry of Intellectual Disability at St George's University of London and Honorary Professor of Spirituality, Theology and Health, University of Durham.

She has worked as a consultant psychiatrist, teacher, researcher and policymaker in intellectual disability and health. As an Independent Member of the House of Lords, she speaks on mental health, disability issues and adverse childhood experiences. She took up the role of President of the RMBF in September 2020.

We asked Sheila to tell us about her background, her life in medicine, and how she thinks the pandemic will change the medical profession.



When I started studying medicine, my medical school had a maximum quota for women of 12%. The expectation was that I would marry one of the male students, and probably work part-time as a general practitioner to support my husband's career – aspirations that seemed fine at the time. There was no career guidance or encouragement for me to pursue advanced qualifications, so I was free to follow my own interests.

As a young mother with a disabled child, I found myself training in child psychiatry with a particular interest in childhood disability. To cut a very long story short, I became an academic clinical psychiatrist working with the pioneering Joan Bicknell, who was the first professor in the psychiatry of learning disability. I succeeded her after she became burnt out by the extraordinary marginalisation and neglect of our patient group.

Policy posts in government, travelling fellowships and elected positions at the Royal College of Psychiatrists eventually led to my becoming President. But in the midst of my exciting and unexpected leadership positions, I faced further family challenges. My youngest daughter's life-threatening injuries, sustained in a criminal attack, filled the front pages of newspapers and television news reports for weeks, and public interest in my personal life threatened to interfere with my professional roles.

For my other Presidencies, my personal struggles have been incidental, but

with the RMBF there is a qualitative difference. My experiences are now directly relevant. Finding the strength and resilience to sustain ourselves, our families and those we love, as well as the extraordinary vocation that is being a doctor, is a challenge that can never be taken for granted. We will all need understanding support at different times in our lives.

What has it been like for me as a retired doctor? To my surprise, I was given back my licence to practice!

The last year has been incredibly challenging for the medical profession. What has it been like for me as a retired doctor? To my surprise, I was given back my licence to practice! I felt somewhat daunted in case I was called to help, as it's some years since I was in clinical practice. But doctors do have some skills and attitudes that are readily generalisable to other areas of need – not least the deep desire to help people.

In addition to continuing my work as a crossbench peer in the House of Lords virtually, I turned my attention to creating wordless resources about Covid-19 with Books Beyond Words, the

charity I had co-founded with my autistic son. The first new pictorial story, called *Beating the Virus*, was loosely based on my son's experience of having Covid right at the beginning of the pandemic. Since then, we have created around 15 free resources specifically for people with learning and communication disabilities. We have started online book clubs for people to share wordless stories and connect with their peers, and contributed to numerous webinars to try to raise awareness of the needs of these often-overlooked groups of people.

Despite my work and my busy role supporting my son and other family members, I have made sure that I walk on our local common every day and keep in touch with wider family and friends online. It has been a strange time of learning and adapting to a new reality and I hope that our lives will evolve in ways that are healthier for ourselves and our planet.

As a now-retired psychiatrist, my heart goes out to younger colleagues in all branches of medicine who are facing the post-Covid period, with its prospect of longer waiting lists, and probably limited investment in innovative new approaches to diagnosis and treatment. All this while they and their colleagues are likely to be feeling burnt out or changed by their experiences on the front line.

There has been much talk in recent years about parity for mental and physical health for our patients, and doctors would be wise to take a similar balanced and kind approach when considering themselves and their colleagues. Friends and family will continue to be key supporters during this period. And doctors are going to need more support than ever before from organisations like the RMBF over the coming years.

Since the beginning of my role as President, all my meetings have been on Zoom! It still feels slightly unreal, as I haven't met most of the staff face-to-face. But despite this, the stark reality of some of the challenges faced by our beneficiaries comes across loud and clear. I find it remarkable that a charity with really quite limited resources is able to do so much, so imaginatively and so sensitively. After the last grants meeting I just wished the charity's resources could be quadrupled overnight. If everyone reading the newsletter – and you, the readers, are our biggest supporters – could possibly dig even deeper, for example by becoming a regular donor, then we could help even more people. Perhaps like me you revised your will this year, or are thinking of doing so, putting your papers in order "just in case". If you might consider leaving a legacy gift, it could have a profound impact on someone's life after your own.

Or might you consider volunteering for the RMBF, or getting involved with your local Guild, alongside some of our amazing existing volunteers? Sometimes it's the hand of friendship, as much as any financial help, that makes the difference for a doctor struggling to come to terms with unexpected health problems or tragedy in their lives.

My first President's Appeal raised an incredible £93,172, and I want to thank everyone who supported the campaign so generously. For myself, I am looking forward to meeting more RMBF volunteers and beneficiaries, so that I can authentically represent and support the charity's work during the rest of my Presidency.

In gratitude

Sheila, Baroness Hollins

Wellbeing in focus

The RMBF website offers a wealth of health & wellbeing resources. Here we present an extract from our recent article on wellbeing during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, written by RMBF volunteer Professor Harj Kaul.

Stay connected

Maintaining well-established and even new relationships with people you trust is important for your mental wellbeing. Think about how you can stay in touch with friends and family via telephone, video calls or social media if you can't meet in person.

Help and support others

Think about how you could help those around you – it could make a big difference to them and can make you feel better too. Could you message a friend or family member nearby?



Are there community groups that you could join to support others locally? Of course, remember to follow the current coronavirus guidance while doing so to keep yourself and others safe. Try to be accepting of other people's concerns, worries or behaviours, and be compassionate to yourself and to others.

Talk about your worries

It is quite common to feel worried, scared or helpless about the current situation. Remember that this is a difficult time for everyone, and sharing how you're feeling – and the things you are doing to cope – with family and friends can help them too. There may well be peer mentors or other structures that have been established in your workplace or community.

Take care of your physical health

Your physical health has a big impact on how you are feeling emotionally and mentally. As this has now gone on for such a long time, it can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour, which in turn can make you feel worse. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water, exercise inside where possible and outside, and try to avoid smoking, excessive drinking, and drugs.

Look after your sleep

Feeling anxious or worried can make it harder to get a good night's sleep. Good-quality sleep makes a big difference to how you feel mentally and physically, so it's important to get enough. Maintain regular sleeping patterns and keep good sleep hygiene practices, like avoiding screens before bed, cutting back on caffeine, and creating a restful environment.

Try to manage difficult feelings

Try to focus on the things you can control, including where you get information from and actions to make yourself feel better prepared. It's okay to acknowledge some of the things that are outside of your control right now, but constant repetitive thoughts about the situation that lead you to feel anxious or overwhelmed are not helpful.

Watch your media diet

24-hour news and constant social media updates can make you more worried. If it is affecting you, try to limit the time you spend watching, reading, or listening to media coverage of the outbreak. It may help to limit the number of times you check the news, or only check it at certain times.

Professor Harj Kaul is a Consultant Occupational Health Physician and Clinical Lead at Leicester University Medical School, Leicester Partnership NHS Trust and Glenfield Hospital.

National Walking Month: challenge yourself!

We know that walking has huge mental and physical health benefits. This May is National Walking Month, so why not lace up the boots and take on a challenge to support doctors affected by the pandemic? With evenings getting lighter, and the weather (hopefully) improving, it's the perfect time to get walking outside. And by setting a personal challenge with a sponsorship target, you can really make it your own!

We've picked out a few suggestions, but there are plenty of options just an internet search away. If you're up for the challenge, we'll be here to support you any way we can, from promoting an online fundraising page to goody bags at the finish line. Get in touch with the team on info@rmbf.org and let us know your plans.

Walk 10,000 steps a day for a month

Get a good playlist on the headphones, ready a step-counter on your phone or smartwatch, and get going!

Race At Your Pace

Choose a challenge from 5 to 300 miles, and log your progress on raceatyourpace.co.uk over the course of the month to earn a medal and other goodies.

Look forward to a bigger challenge

Why not use National Walking Month to kickstart your training for an organised challenge walk? If you're feeling confident, you could try a 25km, 50km or even 100km event from the Ultra Challenge series. Visit ultrachallenges.com to find out more.



In memoriam: Dr Sheila Fowler

Earlier this year we were saddened to hear of the death of Dr Sheila Fowler, a well-respected GP and longstanding supporter of the RMBF.

Born in Chesham Bois, Buckinghamshire, Sheila studied medicine at the University of Sheffield in the late 50s. Her first job as a GP took her to Derby, at a time when female doctors were few and far between.

Sheila's selfless and caring nature soon made her a much-loved figure in the community. It was in her nature to go the extra mile to ensure her patients were doing well, says her daughter, Alison Fowler. "She would often visit people just to check up on them, even if they weren't scheduled for a follow-up."

A family of four adopted children kept her busy, as did her inclination to "made-do-and-mend", taking care of everything from gardening to furniture upholstery to keep the household in good shape.

After working for more than 30 years as a local GP, it was never likely that her retirement in 1998 would lead to her stepping back from the community of which she was such an integral part. Sheila made the most of her time, participating in a range of societies and activities, often for good causes.



Volunteering for the RMBF was one of these causes, and for many years Sheila held the position of Treasurer for the Derby Guild. She helped it to remain one of the most active and successful of the charity's Guilds, raising thousands of pounds every year to support fellow doctors in their hour of need. Sheila also volunteered her time for Victim Support.

She loved travel, day-tripping with the Derbyshire Dilettante Society and holidaying with sister Jean. But Derby remained her home, and the place

where she would be greeted warmly in the street by her former patients well after her retirement.

Despite a diagnosis of Alzheimer's in 2018, Sheila remained active and enjoyed daily walks with Alison, who was her mother's full-time carer for the last years of her life.

She was admitted to Derbyshire Royal Hospital after falling and breaking her ankle. She died in January after contracting Covid-19 while in hospital. Her funeral was held at Markeaton Crematorium in Derby, with a live webcast meaning that despite restrictions, her many friends, family and loved ones could pay tribute.

"She was mum to more than just her kids," says Alison. "The most kind, caring, selfless, patient, tolerant, positive, funny and considerate person anyone could wish to meet. She touched the lives of so many people. She wasn't religious but her philosophy in life was that 'We are on this planet to help each other' – a maxim she followed to the letter."

From everyone at the RMBF, our heartfelt condolences to Sheila's friends and family.

**Dr Sheila Cameron Fowler
10 January 1929–18 January 2021**