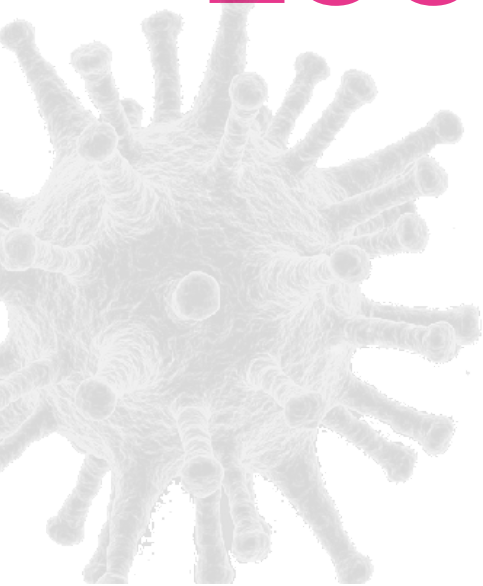




Long Covid Nurse Group Meeting Summary

'Looking after yourself'

Tuesday 21 January 2025
10am - 11.30am, via Zoom



Welcome

Helen Donovan, QN, Long Covid Programme Lead, The QNI, @HelenDon_RN

- Welcome everyone and happy new year! This meeting today is all about wellbeing, what makes us feel good, what helps us with our wellbeing.
- The Long Covid Nurse Group (LCNG) is a community of practice for nurses in the community to improve care and increase understanding about the physical, mental and emotional effects of Long Covid. It offers an online network of nursing colleagues; bimonthly meetings with expert speakers; regular newsletters; dedicated pages on the QNI website; Long Covid resources.
- Please get in touch if you would like to write a blog for us about either your struggles with Long Covid and/or management options, email me at helen.donovan@qni.org.uk
- To find out more or join the network, go to:

<https://qni.org.uk/nursing-in-the-community/long-covid-nurse-group/>

or scan the QR code below:



- Thank you to the [National Garden Scheme](#) for their continued support of the network.



1. Overview of the National Garden Scheme and support for the QNI

George Plumptre, Chief Executive, The National Garden Scheme

History

- We were founded by the QNI in 1927, and we have been closely connected ever since.
- Ever since you founded us we've given general support, but we've also supported specific programmes like:
 1. Executive Nurse Leadership Programme (recently rebranded as Leading Strategically),
 2. The Long Covid network,
 3. The General Practice Nurse network,
 4. The Homeless & Inclusion Health Nurse network,
 5. The Children's Community Nurse network,
 6. The Elsie Wagg Scholarships,
 7. As well as the Queen's Nurse programme: we enabled the QNI to restart the QN programme back in 2007 - it's such a wonderful programme. When I attended my first ceremony there were close to 400 Queen's Nurses and now there are close to 3000.

Other long term beneficiaries

- Whilst the QNI is the most important beneficiary to us - as you brought us into the world, to use a nursing analogy - we have other beneficiaries too.
- We had £3.5 million total donations, it's nice to feel our annual donations do increase; we've increased year on year, since covid.
- We raise money by people opening their gardens; they generously give to us and we proceed to give out that money to various beneficiaries (see next slide).



1. Overview of the National Garden Scheme and support for the QNI

George Plumptre, Chief Executive, The National Garden Scheme

Research

- In 2021 we published a piece of research with the LSE, 'Health Charities and the NHS, A vital partnership in peril?' which looked at the contribution of all health charities during Covid and afterwards, [read it here](#).

Gardens and Health

- We're very proud of our Gardens & Health campaign – how gardening/visiting gardens is good for you.
- We commissioned the King's Fund to write a report on the benefits of gardens and gardening on health, [read it here](#).
- Every year we have Gardens and Health week, this year it will take place from 3-11 May, [find out more here](#).
- Our community gardens programme is very important to us: we've had over 700 applications for the 2024/25 year. It's creating opportunities for a wide spectrum of communities around the country.
- Several gardens open in February and then again in summer and we find that they have more visitors in February. It highlights the importance of having access to the outdoors and green space, especially in lifting spirits and countering the misery of winter.
- Find a garden to visit near you: <https://findagarden.ngs.org.uk/>



2. My Long Covid journey - my update

Salli Pilcher, Queen's Nurse

My story

- I wrote a blog for the QNI about my Long Covid story, ([you can read it here](#))
- I'm a Long Covid Warrior or Survivor as I like to call it
- I'm also one of 2 million wild swimmers in the UK
- 5 years ago in March I contracted Covid - I got the Wuhan strain. Since then, I've had Covid twice more, with each recovery becoming harder and longer.
- Social media has helped me connect with others. On one hospital ward, I met a chaplain with Long Covid and directed him to resources on the QNI website. He told me I'd provided chaplaincy to him and was deeply grateful.
- Sharing our experiences is vital, as research into Long Covid is ongoing.
- I'm fortunate to be high-functioning with Long Covid, still managing to work and find joy in life, though many aren't as lucky. The Persistent Pain Psychology Service has been invaluable for my well-being.

How I cope

- Some days are tough, with poor sleep, brain fog, and neuropathic pain. Weekends are often spent recovering, impacting family time - it's like being a toy running out of battery.
- Strategies like tai chi or wild swimming help make my best days better.



2. My Long Covid journey - my update

Salli Pilcher, Queen's Nurse

Long Covid research

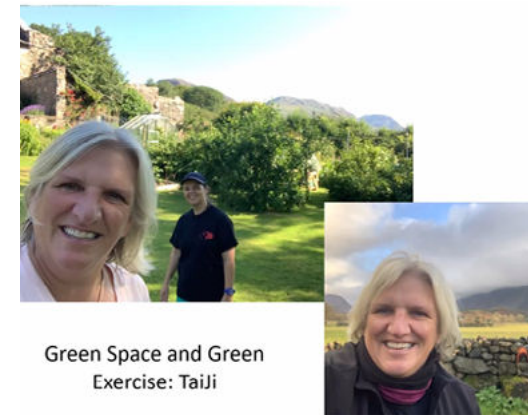
- This clinical update on Long Covid by Trisha Greenhalgh (et al) resonated with me as it highlighted joint pain, [you can read it here](#).
- It recognises fatigue and that unmoderated exercise can exacerbate symptoms. It's about pacing.
- There is a little research and some of it says that if you've had symptoms of Long Covid for over 2 years; it's not looking good.
- So I've experimented with lots of supplements: the Lipoic Acid and COQ10 have been very helpful - especially with the fatigue levels.

Cold Water swimming

- This has been extremely helpful.
- The vagus nerve is stimulated when you submerge your head and neck in cold water. Yale University is working on research about this.

Green and blue space and Blue exercise

- I do tai chi ("meditation in motion") twice a week, once with my instructor Kerry in her amazing garden. The birds are singing it's a beautiful green space. It decreases pain and improves depression.
- Space and place is very key.
- I do tai chi in Kerry's garden but also on zoom and whilst it's good on zoom, it's nowhere near as refreshing.



Green Space and Green
Exercise: Taiji

2. My Long Covid journey - my update

Salli Pilcher, Queen's Nurse

Blue Exercise

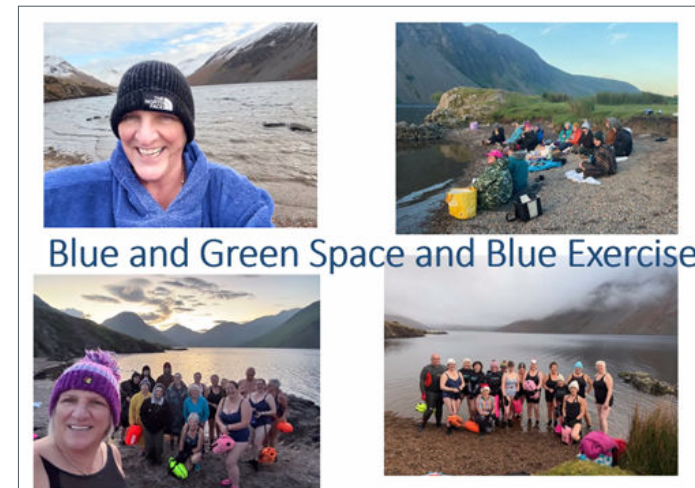
- You can see from the photos below, they're my tribe. All sizes, all ages, all reasons for going cold water swimming.*
- The group below started off as two overweight ladies, now it's 50 people strong. The oldest lady started swimming at 80 years old! We have cake in the park after a dip. Men have now joined the group too.

Reasons for wild swimming*

- Everyone has their own reasons for wild swimming: mental health challenges, health challenges, or it just makes them feel fantastic and connected to nature.
- We've got GPs, nurses, shepherds, every huge range of background and professions, we've connected through that love of swimming and being immersed in blue exercise, blue and green space. I think it's connection to each other and space.
- Sitting on the beach by the lake breathing that wide space, is enough to recharge some of those batteries.

Evidence

- Mark Christie and David Elliott from University of Cumbria researched benefits of open water swimming, [read their research piece, 'From a dark place to a blue space' here.](#)



2. My Long Covid journey - my update

Salli Pilcher, Queen's Nurse

- They researched effects on PTSD, depression, suicidal ideations, all of which can improve in that blue space.
- More women than men swim in the UK, but that is changing now. There is such a huge amount of benefits of cold water swimming.
- The natural environment registers on a deep level in us. The place is important.
- I lost my golf to Long Covid, I lost the social connection but I've recreated that through swimming.
- I also have a pod at home, so that when I can't go wild swimming I can go into the very cold water. The benefits don't last long though, and it doesn't give the same buzz as wild swimming.
- The sense of community, belonging, has really helped me in my journey.

Holiday

- I went on holiday with my son, last year, to Iceland. Our trip was planned to allow for lots of rest, and it helped with the drain. I had to put in for more leave for recovery when I came back (I went away for 4 days and had another 6 days off to recover when I got back). But I did it and I made memories in green and blue space and I swam every day in beautiful spaces. I went snorkelling in the lagoons and achieved a few things on my bucket list.
- I'll not give up, I've found my place, my sense of connection and belonging, which helps me psychologically. I'm a Long Covid warrior!



Thank you to all delegates who attended today's meeting.

FEEDBACK:

You are great and a champion for all with long covid.

Well done Sally!

I do wild swimming up here in North Wales (mainly in the sea) and then we hop in a communal sauna after a dip and it is amazing! Been twice this winter so far and it left us feeling so invigorated!

Thanks for a great session.

Inspiring talk

Great talk as always George. Thank you.

So inspiring, thank you!

Cold water swimming has literally helped me mentally and physically.



Next meeting:

Wednesday 19 March

Theme: Specific issues and treatments in Long Covid

Speakers:

- Dr D Binita Kane, Respiratory Specialist
- Dr Rae Duncan, Cardiologist

To book your place or to find out more go to:

<https://qni.org.uk/news-and-events/events/long-covid-nurse-group-meeting/>

