

Hello!

Welcome to the twentieth newsletter from the Lambeth GP Food Co-operative. There's plenty of exciting news and updates from our latest activities, as well as some personal reflections and a chance to get to know our team.

We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter. If you would like to keep up to date with our work visit our website (<http://lambeth.gpfoodcoop.org.uk/>), Twitter feed and Instagram (both [@gpfoodcoop](#)).



NEWSLETTER – AUGUST 2020

Update from Ed:

Since our last newsletter in June we have begun to support patients recovering from Covid-19 by providing gardening buddies. This is a simple idea which draws on a model of coaching support used extensively across the NHS. The aim is to support patients who, due to ill health are unable to join one of the gardening groups by supporting them garden at home. Many of them do not have a garden of their own and we support them grow vegetables on windowsills or elsewhere in their flats.

Our gardening buddies are members of the Lambeth GP Food Co-op with prior experience of supporting patients and others through coaching, mentoring and other forms of support within the wider health sector. We are planning to develop this work over the coming months if resources are available to do so.

I am delighted to report that working with the Dietetics Help Team a further resource has been developed to help patients recovering from Covid-19. The team has produced a Covid-19 Food First nutritional recipe book specifically to help patients better manage their diets during their recovery. We are planning to make this recipe book available in September. I would like to thank Kattya and Ana for their superb work on producing this resource.

This issue includes some of our thoughts on being together in the Lambeth GP Food Co-op. The idea of co-operation is not a new one but our experience does add value to the wider understanding of what it means to be working co-operatively especially in a time of crisis. To deepen our relationship with the wider co-op movement we became full members of Co-op's UK in June this year.

Our garden communities are all open and busy. We will be welcoming the Refugee Clinical Team to the Katakata/ Brixton Hill surgery garden early next month and look forward to working with them in the future.



Harvesting the courgettes at the Pulross Centre, Brixton this summer.

Dr David Wickstead, GP at Corner Surgery writes:

It's such a simple idea – patients growing food together in GP surgeries – yet I have seen the benefits it brings for both patients and staff who get involved. As a GP I am always trying, believe it or not, to avoid prescribing drugs. Often what is needed is distraction, enjoyment, fresh air and comradeship. I smile when I see pictures of patients holding the vegetables they have just harvested – and they always seem to be smiling too. We know it is good for both physical and mental health.

When my wife died suddenly 7 years ago I took a lot of comfort from sitting in our local park. I remember seeing a tree which had had a large branch blown off in a storm making it look out of shape. It mirrored for me what had happened to our family, but over time the tree adapted and regained its shape, albeit different from before. Fruit and vegetables on my allotment (and even more so on my neighbours' allotments!) still surprise me in the way they can flourish after the bleaker winter months, raising your spirits. I believe lots of us need to spend more time outside working and living with the natural world around us.

Our surgery, The Corner Surgery on Coldharbour Lane, has been a member of the Co-op for 5 years and we had 12 raised beds made for us in Jennie Lee Garden on the King's site, as we don't have a garden big enough at the surgery. Often in general practice there are lots of initiatives that come and go before you have recognised their value or that they exist. This project has continued, and so staff now remember it is there and have heard from patients how they enjoy it. I was very pleased when our staff, together with our patient participation group, came up with the idea of a crowdfunder to raise funds to pay our fantastic gardener, Flora, to keep running the sessions. With match funding from Lambeth Council we will be able to fund the project for two years.

As treasurer for the Co-op this is particularly pleasing. Although we have had some large grants in the early years, and Ed is very good at applying for different pots of money here and there, we have come to the conclusion over time that each surgery should aim to be self-funded. We have seen different models for this develop from using volunteer gardeners, donations from surgeries, links with a local restaurant and crowdfunding. It's these local innovations which will allow the Co-op to continue and flourish in the future.

The great ideas from Ed and the team in response to COVID-19 are another example of innovating and trying out new ways of doing things. Seeds in food parcels – a simple idea which we hope will bring comfort and hope to people after a bleak few months. Thank you Carine, Amanda, Lydia, Ryan and Tayla especially at The Corner Surgery, but also to all the people that make things happen in other practices and elsewhere in the Co-op.



Corner Surgery patients harvesting produce at the Jennie Lee Garden, Kings College Hospital.

My Journey with Lambeth GP Food Co-op:

I had expected to have time to put my feet up and do some travelling when I retired from NHS nursing in 2012. How wrong could I be as becoming a founding member of LGPFC almost put paid to my plans. I had been involved in the Expert Patients Programme, a self-management course for people with long term health conditions. At one of our meetings held at Lambeth Walk surgery, I learnt about plans to create a new vegetable garden in the empty alley way at the surgery. Dr Raj Mitra, lead GP at Lambeth Walk was enthusiastic along with Janine Nelson, Outreach worker from the Garden Museum who was supporting gardening at the surgery.

So with their help and support, I joined Ivor Picardo and Ed Rosen from Lambeth GP Food Co-op to help build the garden in February 2013. I could see the links between our work with EPP which helps patients with diabetes and other long term conditions to become better at managing their conditions and the ethos of the gardening project with its valuing of people gardening together to improve their health and sense of well-being. Over the years we have transformed the empty space into a flourishing, beautiful oasis of plants and flowers, with a variety of herbs, vegetables, fruit trees and more.

In my role as group leader I have supported a lovely group of patients many of whom have grown in confidence and commitment, becoming happy and joyous people. I too have grown through facilitating and mentoring the group. I have watched an acorn become a Maple tree. I look forward to many more years gardening for health well into the future.

Earline Hilda Castillo-Binger

Team Leader-Lambeth Walk and Grantham Surgery Gardening Groups,
Retired NHS--RN, RM, RHV, Haemoglobinopathies Specialist,
Nurse/ Team Leader/ Student Mentor/ Nurse Prescriber,
Volunteer EPP/LWD/Sickle Cell Society Carer/ Safeguarding,
Representative in Southwark.



The garden at Lambeth Walk Surgery in 2013 (left) and this year (right).

What are we for? My reflections on Lambeth GP Food Co-op:

I am writing this piece for our newsletter during a global pandemic which has had a devastating impact on our lives. The Covid-19 virus has taught us just how fragile our current economic and social arrangements are when faced with profound disruption and dislocation, but it has also taught us to pay more attention to the values that are often buried within our fraying social fabric.

Without waiting for orders from above, hundreds of mutual aid groups emerged across the country, offering help and support to anyone and everyone in the community who needed it. This emergence of mutuality at mass scale took my breath away. My local mutual aid network has been a joy to engage with as it has helped us manage our time during lock down and self-isolation by knowing that there are people in the streets around who can offer help and support when needed.

Now you may know where I am going with this thought, but I won't go back to the setting up of the Lambeth GP Food Co-op to say that mutuality was a key theme in our early discussions because it wasn't quite there, or it was to take a bit more time to emerge in how we work together. What was there at the beginning, was a flickering sense of us as a community of people stumbling into a place or time called a co-operative and becoming something like fellow travellers into an unknown and unpredictable glorious adventure.

In his book 'Together' (Allan Lane 2012), the sociologist Richard Sennett describes the rituals, pleasures and politics of Co-operation. When I think about our achievements so far I can make links between the pleasures of growing our NHS courgettes at Jennie Lee garden (Kings's College Hospital), the rituals of providing free pumpkin pies at the Pulross Centre, Brixton on the 31st October. I can even enjoy to some limited extent, the everyday politics in cooperating both with other cooperators and of course the uncooperative.

Our journey so far has included fits and starts, heartbreak and laughter. Good harvests and not so good. Our learning is for each of us to name and speak. For me the experiment has freed me to return to my roots by reaffirming the notion of solidarity amongst a community that I call my own.

Confucius as far as I know, wasn't a member of any old cooperative but he did have something important to say for us cooperators:

'I hear and I forget

I see and I remember

I do and I understand '

We will continue to share our understanding and learning with all who wish to co-operate in the interests of our shared future.

Ed Rosen

Learning from experience: co-operation and gardening for the health of people and planet

I'm Shuo, a psychiatry trainee in South London and I have been lucky enough to have been a member of the Lambeth GP Food Co-op for almost four years now, and more recently board lead on climate change and sustainability. Whilst I fully accept that I am not a GP, there has been something magical about getting to know the local GP practices, with their inspiring patients and other staff which has informed and enriched how I approach my psychiatric practice.

How I got involved

I heard about the Lambeth GP Food Co-op through word of mouth. Unlike many of my other junior doctor colleagues, who had moved around a bit during early years of training, I was fortunate enough to build up experience working and living in South London. I was also interested in sustainability and healthcare, so I heard about the co-op through those networks. I was immediately inspired to get involved as I felt the project was both simple and achievable. At the heart is a very simple idea- to get patients to grow fruit and veg on GP practice land- but it had the potential to have wide ranging benefits. I always think of the co-op is a holistic way to promote physical activity and healthy eating, foster resilient communities, decrease social isolation, food miles and more.

What I learnt

The Lambeth GP Food Co-op is not just about growing fruit and veg, but it is also about growing ideas, relationships and a community of people that could have a wider impact on how healthcare is experienced and delivered. We are rooted in the local community in Lambeth but have national reach and resonate with other emerging interests both present and past.

Over the years I have also had an opportunity to explore some of these resonances, such as the Peckham Experiment- a project which ran from 1926-1950 in Peckham which investigated what happened when people were given the resources to cultivate health for themselves and their community. In March 2018, some of these historical connections were renewed at the South London Gallery when we hosted an event jointly with the Art Assassin's the SLG's youth forum. We showed a screening of A Pool of Information (Jini Rawlings, 1993, 35min) and a short film about the work of the Lambeth GP Food Coop, which was followed by a discussion exploring the legacy of the Peckham Experiment, and what it means to strengthen relationships between healthcare services and the community today.

At a national level, partly through the networks around the Co-op and partly through my overlapping work on the sustainability committee of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, I have seen how the conversations around sustainable healthcare and social prescribing have developed. There is now a greater emphasis within Public Health England on the importance of acting on climate change, and in strengthening communities through providing more social support with a greater recognition that both will benefit both planet and people. However, there is still a lot to learn, and a lot of learning to be shared across the NHS and hopefully the we can remain a part of this.

Shuo Zhang

