

londonage

Age UK London Magazine Winter 2016



Air Quality

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breath away in a good way?

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Comment

Paul Goulden
CEO
Age UK London



One of my colleagues recently attended an event run by a coalition of organisations committed to better air quality, less pollution and a more direct approach to tackling these issues.

Age UK London, as a partner of the Healthy Air Campaign in London, are happy share many of the same values.

Sadly however, older people were not mentioned at the event. The literature available on the day displayed images of younger people who, quite rightly, need to be protected from the terrible effects of London's poor air quality.

But older people need that same protection. We don't believe there has been enough research on the impact poor air quality has on older people and we don't believe the scale of the problem for older people is being faithfully represented on this issue.

We hope that having air quality as the main theme of this edition of London Age will go a little way to changing that. We also hope, over the coming years, to do more to highlight the issue and call on other organisations engaged in this fight to focus more on older people as they continue the excellent job they are doing.



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Top news

'Please Offer Me a Seat' Badge Trial Successful!



Following the success of the 'Please offer me a seat' trial, Transport for London have announced the badge and card will be introduced on a permanent basis early next year.

The trial was designed to help customers who need a seat, but have difficulty getting one. It was met with extremely positive reviews:

- Participants reported 72 per cent of journeys as being easier as a result
- On 86 per cent of journeys participants reported feeling more confident when asking for a seat on public transport
- An overwhelming 98 per cent of participants said they would recommend the badge and card to somebody they think needs or would benefit from one.

The badge and card are planned to launch to all customers who need one early next year.

Age UK London Appoint New Chief Executive

Age UK London are delighted that Paul Goulden, formerly Chief Executive of Age UK Bexley, has taken on the role of Chief Executive.

David Simpson, Chair, Age UK London, said: "We are delighted that Paul has joined Age UK London as our new Chief Executive and look forward to many future successes in his new responsibilities."

You can read Paul's first comment on the previous page. Paul has contributed to the Age UK London Blog for several years, and in 2017 you'll be able to read him regularly at www.ageuklondonblog.org.uk.

Age UK Camden Service Celebrates 50th Birthday

Henderson Court celebrated its 50th birthday and International Day of Older Persons on October 1st.

Nearly 100 guests enjoyed performances from Bolder Voices choir, a photography exhibition, and speeches from Tulip Siddiq MP and Siobhan Baillie, Councillor for Frognal and Fitzjohns ward.

Henderson Court is one of many services provided by Age UK Camden, alongside befriending, counselling, advice and much more.

Does London take your breath away?

London can be breath-taking but not always in the right way. People may not be surprised to learn that it has some of the dirtiest air in the UK but many will not realise the damage it does to our health. It doesn't have to be this way; we should all be able to breathe cleaner air in our city. Andrea Lee is the Healthy Air Campaigner at ClientEarth. She works with health, transport and environmental partners to campaign for more action to tackle air pollution.



Imagine a city where every year thousands of early deaths were being caused by drinking water. There would be a public outcry and politicians would be lining up to demand immediate action to clean up the water. Now imagine that, instead of water, it was the air that was polluted. What would happen then?

Air pollution in London is up to three times over legal limits in places and causes over 9,000 early deaths annually, worsening the quality of life for many thousands more. Children and older people are some of the groups that are especially vulnerable to this toxic air. The Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health have highlighted the lifelong impacts of air pollution, from the womb and into later life, in their report, 'Every breath we take'.

From premature births and reduced lung development in children, to increasing the risk of cancer and of hospitalisation and death from heart and breathing conditions in adults. There is also a growing body of evidence linking air pollution to diabetes, autism, mental health and an impaired ability to learn.

The Healthy Air Campaign believes we all

have the right to breathe clean air. It is a national coalition of health, transport and environmental organisations raising awareness of the health impacts of air pollution and campaigning for more action by government at all levels to tackle the problem. Coordinated by environmental law charity, ClientEarth, partners include British Lung Foundation, Campaign for Better Transport and Friends of the Earth. In London, the campaign is supported by the London Cycling Campaign, Clean Air in London, London Sustainability Exchange and Age UK London.

The Healthy Air Campaign believes we all have the right to breathe clean air.

Air pollution has become one of the most high profile issues in London in the past 18 months. In the recent London mayoral elections, the main candidates all claimed that they would be the ones to finally clean up the capital's air. The new mayor Sadiq Khan even says that he developed asthma as an adult because of London's dirty air so he has a personal stake in the issue.

In 2015, legal action by ClientEarth resulted



in the UK Supreme Court ordering the UK Government to draw up new plans to meet legal limits of air pollution in the shortest possible time. These plans were deemed woefully inadequate and, in March 2016, ClientEarth launched a new case against the UK Government.

ClientEarth were again successful and, on 2nd November, the High Court ordered the government to improve its plans by the end of July 2017. Under the current plans, London was not expected to meet legal limits designed to minimise the most harmful impacts of air pollution until at least 2025 – more than 15 years after the original deadline. So the new plans should look to do better than this.

While there is no single solution, the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ), developed under

the previous Mayor and due to start in 2020, is key to reducing London's air pollution. The ULEZ addresses one of the main sources of air pollution in London, road transport and in particular diesel vehicles. It will set minimum standards for emissions and any vehicle not meeting these will be charged for entering the area. For now, however, the ULEZ will only apply to the Congestion Charge Zone in central London and even the previous Mayor knew that this would not be enough.

Since becoming mayor, Mr Khan has been proposing improvements to these plans. He has recently consulted on an Emissions Surcharge (also called the toxicity or t-charge) that could apply to some of the oldest vehicles entering central London from October 2017. He is also proposing to extend the ULEZ for cars and vans to the North and South Circulars and to the whole of Greater



London for taxis, buses, coaches and lorries by 2019.

This increased ambition is welcomed by many but the proposals were made before the recent High Court ruling. And so, like the UK Government, the Mayor will have to make sure he does everything he can to clean up London's air.

The Mayor will have to make sure he does everything he can to clean up London's air.

This could include applying the t-charge to all diesel vehicles – 2015's Volkswagen scandal highlighted how new diesel cars are more polluting than the laboratory tests suggest. The mayor should also look at all options for protecting the health of all

Londoners by extending the ULEZ for all vehicles across Greater London. He should be developing a zero-emissions transport network with central London as a starting point. These are just some of the actions that could be taken.

This is not to forget the role that the UK Government has to play in helping the capital breathe cleaner air. With people's support, ClientEarth and its partners will continue to call on the government and the mayor to do all they can not only to guarantee London's right to clean air but also to put the city on the path towards a healthier and more sustainable future for all.

Find out more about the Healthy Air Campaign's work in London by visiting www.healthyair.org.uk/london

Air quality: whose problem is it anyway?

Cllr Maisie Anderson, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Parks and Leisure, Southwark Council, tells us how her Council is tackling air pollution as an age friendly borough.



Back in 2014, Southwark Council announced plans to become ‘an age friendly’ borough. This came about after a consortium of older peoples’ services challenged the council to produce a strategy that would improve the quality of the lives of our borough’s older population.

Never a council to shy away from a challenge, Southwark launched an extensive consultation into the experiences of older residents as well as those approaching later life.

The feedback gleaned helped shape traditional council services including adult social care, housing and community safety. But it was also apparent that older people are being affected by perhaps less obvious issues where the council can have an impact, such as air quality.

Air pollution is often thought to be one of the unavoidable gripes of city living, like traffic and crowded tubes. But the level of harmful pollutants in London’s air is now over the legal limit in some areas and has become a public health emergency. According to research from King’s College London, approximately 9,500 people a year die from diseases linked to poor air quality. Sadly, those worst affected include the elderly, as well as the very young and those with pre-existing respiratory conditions.

But who is really responsible for improving the quality of the air that we all breathe? It seems obvious to look to central government for a solution. Indeed, a recent High Court ruling did just this, stating that the Environment Secretary had failed to take measures that would bring the UK into compliance with the law as soon as possible. It is for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to coordinate action to meet the air quality targets set by the European Union, but the buck is often passed to devolved organisations to deal with locally.

Perhaps responsibility lies with regional agencies like Transport for London (TfL), who manages the majority of London’s road network. The vast majority of air pollution in London is caused by road traffic on routes controlled and maintained by TfL after all.

Or maybe it’s the responsibility of local councils. Despite the deep cuts to local government budgets from central government, improving the health and wellbeing of residents is an absolute priority for Southwark and has driven – amongst many others – the following initiatives:

- Joint working with Transport for London (TfL) to make improvements to public transport

- Successfully lobbying TfL to extend the Ultra Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ) to the south circular area
- A £30m investment in sustainable walking and cycling improvements, including a new segregated cycling route across the borough and Quietway routes
- Installation of more vehicle charging points for electric and hybrid cars
- Work with contractors to minimise pollution from building sites and enforce against serial polluters.

However the question remains, who is ultimately responsible for tackling air pollution?

The simple answer is that we all are. All levels

of government, businesses and local communities have a part to play in reducing air pollution.

#Onething is Southwark Council's recent campaign to empower residents to take a simple action to help tackle air pollution; whether it's choosing to set aside the car in favour of walking or cycling to the shops, or regularly servicing gas fires or heaters in the home. These seemingly small changes can make a real difference for generations to come.

So with the New Year on the horizon, why not commit to doing one thing differently in 2017? Below is a list of key actions that you can take.

What #onething can you do?

The greatest risk of harm from air pollution in the home is from poorly maintained gas fires or heaters. Ensure these appliances are serviced regularly and consider installing a carbon monoxide alarm.

Turning off the car engine when stationary helps to save fuel and limits nitrogen dioxide emissions.

Opt for collecting online purchases from local shops over home deliveries. That way one driver drops all the local deliveries in one place, instead of 50 vans releasing emissions as they make lots of individual journeys.

Avoid busy roads if you have breathing problems, a heart condition or asthma. Sign up to the airText app (www.airtext.info/signup) for regular air quality forecasts and download the Walk It app (www.walkit.com) for advice on less polluted routes. It's also a good idea to carry medication or an inhaler on high pollution days.

Regular exercise helps to reduce the affects of poor air quality. Southwark residents can sign up to the council's free gym and swim offer, available at any of the local leisure centres. Southwark Council also offers free cycle training to all residents. Visit the council's website for details (www.southwark.gov.uk/cycling).

Can grassroots organisations change air quality in London?

Cllr Paul Gadsby, Lambeth Council, found himself elected to one of the most polluted areas in the country. He outlines the challenges ahead, as well as the successes of local organisations and campaigns.

Anyone who lives in South London will know that it is an area that has always had challenges to tackle and opportunities to exploit. Today is no different. Lambeth encompasses a dynamic, vibrant stretch of the capital that begins on the banks of the Thames around Waterloo and runs down to Clapham and Brixton before rolling out to the suburbs of Norwood and Streatham. It is a borough that attracts people from all ages and all backgrounds because it has something to offer everyone. But there is in the background a serious yet invisible threat from appalling levels of air pollution that is placing at risk the health of every resident who works and lives in Lambeth. And sadly this threat is one that affects many major cities across the UK.

As a local councillor for an area close to Brixton, I remember shortly after my election three years ago reading about levels of pollution on the long A23 route which runs through the heart of my constituency. It carries a phenomenal amount of heavy traffic across Lambeth, particularly from buses and heavy goods vehicles, and according to the statistics in that report my local patch was, to my surprise, one of the most polluted in the country. In 2015 it breached the yearly limit for diesel fume pollution in four days: in other words the area used up 365 days' worth of safe emissions

in just 96 hours. Like a lot of people I didn't know about this problem because it is invisible, there are no physical signs of smog or black clouds hanging in the air. What is most shocking is that the part of the A23 on my doorstep, called Brixton Road, has within half a mile several schools, tightly packed housing and sheltered accommodation residences.

In 2015 my area breached the yearly limit for diesel fume pollution in four days.

My constituency is not particularly unique in suffering from poor air quality. Streatham, Oxford Street, Earls Court and Putney High Street all breach their recommended air toxin limits by the end of January each year. And many other big cities face exactly the same situation. The impact on health from these levels of toxins is devastating. 9,000 Londoners each year die from conditions related to poor air quality.

For older people with conditions like asthma or heart disease, any level of elevated pollution can agitate existing symptoms. Much of the focus in the media has, quite understandably, focused on how children are particularly at risk as a quarter of London schools sit within high pollution areas.



However, too little attention has focused on the other end of the age scale. As already mentioned, in my area several sheltered accommodation residences sit very close to Brixton Road. But many of my constituents over the age of 60 live on the estates and streets that branch out around the same location. While it's encouraging that in the three years since I first became aware of the issue awareness has increased, the impact on older people has remained an afterthought.

I realise that so far this has not been cheery reading, and I'll not pretend that a long road doesn't lie ahead to tackle this problem. But there are signs that London is both waking up to the challenge and taking action. At a grassroots level, residents are coming together to discuss and then do something practical about this threat. In my area, one group called Lambeth for a Cool Planet has organised marches and events to draw attention to poor air quality in Brixton and Streatham. These types of organisations have worked with councillors to push this issue up the political agenda locally. In Lambeth, last year, we successfully lobbied with a petition signed by hundreds of residents to bring

forward the introduction of cleaner, safer engines on buses on the A23 route, resulting in a small, but encouraging, improvement in local air quality. We have launched campaigns to prevent car idling and boosted support for cycling. Lambeth has just concluded a consultation on a five year air quality action plan to bring all this together, the first of its kind. And the new Mayor of London has already introduced air quality alerts and pollution controls.

Unfortunately national government's approach remains shambolic. In November, its air quality plan was embarrassingly struck down in the high court for being 'illegally poor' and failing to abide by legislation that requires cuts in air pollution. What is worrying is that this demonstrates a level of incompetency that suggests this issue isn't seen as a priority.

And that is why all of us need to keep up the pressure. So if you're concerned about the health of the young and the old, write to your local councillor and your MP asking what they are doing to tackle this problem. It's an issue we cannot continue to ignore.

My dream for older Londoners

Donnachadh McCarthy FRSA, runs 3 Acorns Eco-audits, which helps deliver the Corporation of London's City Bridge Trust's eco-auditing project. He is also the author of a number of books on the environment and politics. After a well received series of articles for London Age last year, here Donnachadh tells us how older people can make profit on bills!

I have a dream for older people in London. I want them all to be in the same lucky position that I am in with my utility bills. Last year I made a net profit from them of £122! My annual gas bill was £12, water £110 and electricity £100. But I was paid back £350 for the solar electricity produced on the roof of my home.

I did this by adopting an energy and water efficient lifestyle and by gradually investing the money that I saved from not owning a car, into turning my Victorian home into a retro eco-home, with solid wall insulation, triple glazing, solar electricity and hot water, LED lighting, wood burner and a rain-harvester. To achieve this dream, older people need the three "i's" – Information, Insulation and Investment in renewables.

First, they need Information on how to live eco-friendly life-styles, which will reduce living costs. Low income pensioners would then have more money to spend on healthier food.

The Greening the Third Sector Project, funded by the City Bridge Trust, includes a free training-module for charity advice workers, on using eco-tips to reduce living costs for low-income people, as part of their free eco-audit programme for London's charities. It is my ambition that all advice workers for the elderly, will undergo similar training.

Secondly, homes for the elderly must be improved to low or zero-carbon Insulation standards as soon as possible. London is riddled with sometimes beautiful but usually terribly inefficient older housing-stock. Unlike homes built since the 1940s, those homes have solid brick walls instead of cavity walls, which are very cheap and easy to insulate. Solid brick-walls cost from £10,000 to £20,000 per home to insulate. Such sums are beyond many elderly people.

The government abolished the Green Deal Programme which was about the only one designed to tackle Britain's massive solid-wall insulation backlog. In its absence my advice is, if you can afford it, at least insulate your main living room solid walls. This can cost about £2,000 but it means that the room you are heating the most, will not be leaking massive amounts of expensive heat, in your retirement.

Despite Britain's lethal record on excess winter elderly deaths, the government has also abolished the energy company requirement to pay for universal grants for cavity wall and loft insulation and introduced means-testing. This led to a massive loss of insulation industry jobs and set back completion of the programme by decades. Many elderly will now be paying far more for heating than they should be, for years to come.



However, there are still free boiler replacement, loft and cavity wall grants available to those on most benefits. Ring the Energy Savings Trust advice line on 0300 123 1234 for full details. These grants can save hundreds of pounds from energy bills.

Third and finally - Investment in renewables. If you have a bit of spare cash and a south-facing roof, whilst the amount has been reduced, there is still useful government financial support for installation of solar panels and other renewable electricity and heating systems. These are in the form of annual premium feed-in-tariffs, which pay you for the energy you produce, guaranteed and inflation linked for 20 years, rather than grants. Information is available from www.energysavingtrust.org.uk.

Reducing bills and creating warmer homes for the elderly is crucial, but this investment will

also slash carbon emissions from our homes and is even more important. The climate emergency has resulted in almost every single month for the last 16 months being the hottest such month on record. 2016 is the hottest year ever, just like 2015 and 2014 were. This has been the hottest decade ever, just like the previous decade was. Arctic sea-ice is collapsing, threatening London and major coastal cities across the globe with future flooding.

So, let us make 2017 the year we persuade our tabloid newspapers, local councillors and MPs of the importance of reversing these damaging cuts and convince them to instead speed up these programmes, so that all the elderly, like me, can have utility bills that are an income rather than an expense!

Follow @donnachadhmc on Twitter. Visit www.citybridgetrust.org.uk for more information.

Ethel & Ernest film screening

Raymond Briggs' acclaimed graphic novel Ethel & Ernest, which recounts the true story of his own mum and dad, has been made into a beautiful animated film. Age UK London partnered with Universal Pictures Home Entertainment Content Group to give 45 older Londoners the opportunity to see the film. The simple storyline was powerful and moving, resonated with our audience tremendously and is well worthy of our recommendation.



Age UK London had a fantastic time visiting The Soho Hotel to view the film adaptation of Raymond Briggs' graphic novel Ethel and Ernest. Universal Pictures Home Entertainment Content Group partnered with Age UK London to welcome forty-five older people to watch the movie,

which tells the true story of Briggs' own parents.

Ethel and Ernest are two ordinary Londoners who live through a period of extraordinary social change in the twentieth century. The film allows us to witness the defining



Ernest is voiced by Jim Broadbent while Ethel is voiced by Brenda Blethyn. They are joined by Virginia McKenna, June Brown, Pam Ferris, Simon Day and Roger Allam, with young actor Harry Collett as young Raymond. Ethel & Ernest is directed by Roger Mainwood.

moments of the century, from the Great Depression, to the onset of World War II, right through to the moon landing of 1969.

The heart-warming and bittersweet movie resonated hugely with our audience, with the vast majority of scenes touching upon the real-life experiences of many older Londoners. Several attendees commented afterwards on the relatability and the poignancy of the story, both of which meant there wasn't a dry eye in the house!

The Soho Hotel was a wonderful setting

in which to watch the film, with incredibly comfy armchairs and sofas for all to relax in. Ethel and Ernest is beautifully animated and brought to life by a stellar cast, featuring (amongst others) Jim Broadbent and Brenda Blethyn in the title roles, with Luke Treadaway taking on the role of Raymond.

A humorous and poignant story, Ethel and Ernest is available to watch on BBC1 at 19:30 on Wednesday 28th December. Alternatively you can pick up the DVD upon release on January 2nd 2017.

Fundraising for Age UK London

Age UK London have recently undertaken a new fundraising direction, aiming to get individuals and corporates involved in our work. Danny Elliott, Communications and Fundraising Officer, tells us about recent successes and what is planned for 2017.



Imagine going for a brisk walk on a crisp, December morning only to be met by 4,000 Santas doing star-jumps!

Age UK London took part in DIFC's Santa 5K in early December. It was heartening to have so many colleagues take part in our first run for many years... even if some of them walked! This proves the passion of our staff members, and to raise almost £1000 was a great effort.

Next year we're hoping to go even bigger. Age UK London have designated places in a number of events throughout the year for a wide range of abilities:

- You can run the most 'enjoyable' of half marathons in the Royal Parks Half Marathon

- You can push yourself to the limit in the 100k Thames Path Challenge... or take part in the same event at a shorter distance
- You can run, jog or walk a 5k with 4000 other people dressed in a Santa costume in the Santa Fun Run

We will also have tickets available for concerts where we partner with the Brandenburg Choral Festival. These offerings have been well received in recent years, and we'd be delighted to have you join with us in 2017.

For more information visit www.ageuk.org.uk/london/how-you-can-help or email Danny Elliott on: delliott@ageuklondon.org.uk

New affordable housing plans – a chance for older renters?



Gordon Deuchars, Policy and Campaigns Manager, Age UK London outlines two new proposals from the Mayor of London which could help some older private sector tenants.

Since his election as Mayor of London this year Sadiq Khan has given high public priority to tackling London's need for more housing and in particular, more affordable housing. The GLA recently published proposals for two new affordable rent products, to be called the London Living Rent and the London Affordable Rent. Why are there two with such similar names? What do they mean for older people? At least 145,000 households of people aged 50+ are currently private tenants in London and on present trends, many more are likely to be in the private rented sector in future.

Age UK London's ongoing research suggests many older private renters in London may experience problems in areas such as:

- Security of tenure: assured shorthold tenancies do not meet the need of most older people for secure homes at a rent they can afford;
- Affordability: even in Registered Fair Rent properties, the permitted level of rent increase outstrips rises in pension income;
- Condition of homes and difficulty in obtaining repairs and adaptations. This type of issue, including difficulty in heating homes, can potentially have serious health effects on older people;
- Feelings of powerlessness in relation to landlords and in relation to obtaining their

rights. This may contribute to older tenants 'not daring to ask' for repairs and adaptations;

- Neglect by absent or inattentive landlords (including property companies).

The London Living Rent will be a new intermediate rent product, aimed at people on middle incomes, with the rents capped at a third of average incomes in the local area (local meaning ward level – a guide has been published giving LLR levels for every ward in London). Eligibility is restricted to households who are currently renting, with a maximum income of £60,000. As currently presented, tenancies would be expected to last for at least three years – which clearly gives tenants much more security than shorthold tenancies for a year or six months. On the other hand the idea of five-year tenancies was floated originally. The intention is to link LLR to enabling tenants to save for a deposit to buy a property, initially through shared ownership.

It may well be very good news for tenants who are firstly able to have a bit more security than they would have otherwise in private renting, and secondly might be helped onto the property ladder in the longer term. What, if anything, does it mean for older people? There is no stated age limit for eligibility. People in their 50s who are in paid employment might possibly be able to benefit and



if so, that would be good news in terms of avoiding tomorrow's older people having to rent privately, with the attendant problems. We need to bear in mind that mortgage lenders have age limits for new loans and this could prevent some people from accessing the LLR if it is entirely dependent on having a pathway to being a property owner.

The LLR as proposed is clearly not suitable for a low income pensioner. Realistically, older people on low incomes are very unlikely ever to be able to save to buy a property in London. A solution to most older PRS tenants' needs will have to come from elsewhere.

Alongside the London Living Rent the GLA is putting forward a 'London Affordable Rent' aimed at low income households. (Some may find it confusing that there are two different products with such similar names). The

London Affordable Rent comes with benchmark rates for different types of properties. For example the benchmark rent for a two bedroom flat in 2017-18 is £152.73. Providers can argue for higher rates if they can evidence that they are genuinely affordable. There is nothing in the description of the London Affordable Rent to indicate that older people cannot benefit. Recipients would typically be put forward by the boroughs.

Taken together, these two new affordable rent products might open up possibilities for some older private renters. However we will need more detailed information about eligibility and delivery before we can be sure if they really benefit older people.

Statins - a patient's perspective



The Age UK London blog has been relaunched and we have some great new content. As a taster we've included the below piece. It was written by David Shalit MBE, previously both a Trustee of Age UK London and the Chair of Positive Ageing in London. David received his MBE for services to the City of London Corporation and voluntary service to older people in London.

The below was delivered as a short contribution to a group of Londoners at a regional meeting with an average age around fifty plus, myself at over eighty. Interestingly, it transpired four of us were suffering (or had suffered) with this problem. Indeed, one of the younger group members had given up taking statins due to the severe risk to her future health.

A Statins are medicines prescribed for conditions relating to the heart and the circulatory system. Their necessity varies - according to what one reads in the media - from "necessary for all, particularly men over fifty-five" to "of no use whatsoever".

My consultant, who I have considerable reason to trust, has no doubt that senior cardiac opinion is unanimous in stating that statins are - in my case - completely necessary.

The problem is that statins frequently have unpleasant side effects. In my case, recurrent periods of pain, long periods of discomfort and a never ending feeling of fatigue - the first two making sleeping very difficult. Unfortunately, what one reads in the media is highly inaccurate and frequently misleading, giving advice to us patients which is quite useless in practice!

The reality is there is a choice of statins

available depending on the circumstances and the individual. The required dosage can also be a matter of debate as the acceptable level of cholesterol does seem to vary between doctors.

The choice of which statin is, of course, up to one's doctor and can depend on the cost and (one would guess) on the persuasiveness of their pharmaceutical salesman. Such choices are often influenced by the fact that GPs are under continual cost pressure from the NHS too.

Very few fellow patients I have talked to are aware that there are alternative drugs to the one they are on.

I have also found that if a consultant gives the prescription, the GP nearly always accepts it without question. So this could be the escape route if you are in real difficulty. Consultants also appear to have more time to give to a patient.

Yet the end to my tale is a happy one so far. My statin has been changed, back to the one I was happily on for many years with a reduced dosage and my quality of life enormously improved. I am however still awaiting the next blood test to see if my cholesterol level is OK. If problems persist, my consultant is willing to keep on trying so that I can continue to have an acceptable quality of life.

In the hotseat...

George Harvey, Communications Assistant at Age UK London shares his thoughts on his role.

Why are older people's issues important to you?

Because these issues are so often ignored! I frequently come up against the myth that the older generation has been 'gifted everything' and therefore need no assistance.

What projects are you involved in?

I use our digital communication channels to promote our publications and campaign work. I'm currently invested in revamping our Facebook page and making sure our redesigned blog has new articles every Friday. I am most heavily involved in the Older Private Sector Tenants Programme which is funded by the Nationwide Foundation. This is an 18-month consultation to discover the issues faced by older private renters across the capital, with a view to presenting these problems to the Mayor of London.

What are the biggest concerns you hear from older people?

Due to my role in the OPSTP, I hear most often

about problems in the private rental sector. The majority of older people I work with feel trapped and vulnerable in their current property and try to stay silent to avoid eviction. It's incredibly important for Age UK London to give these people a voice.

What has been your best experience in working with older people?

To date, it was when attending a focus group in Camden. An older lady who was present to raise awareness of her terrible housing situation approached me and from nowhere just rattled off a series of brilliant jokes. It was so unexpected that we ended up laughing for a good few minutes!

What is your vision for your work at Age UK London?

To continue to promote all of the work we do here to make London a great place to grow older – I want as many people to know about this as possible! Long term, I hope to create an online space for older Londoners to receive advice and to communicate with one another.

Editor

Danny Elliott

Contributors

Cllr Maisie Anderson
Gordon Deuchars
Cllr Paul Gadsby
George Harvey
Andrea Lee
Donnachadh McCarthy
David Shalit

London Age highlights issues which affect older people in the capital. It is produced to support Age UK London's mission to improve the quality of life for older Londoners and to enhance their status and influence.

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@ageuklondon

Age UK London works across the capital to improve the quality of life for older people and to enhance their status and influence.

If you have any comment on the magazine content or ideas for the next issue, we'd love to hear from you: delliottd@ageuklondon.org.uk

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