

# Holt WI

Returning refreshed and full of news after our summer break, Holt WI reconvened for a fairly packed meeting at the beginning of September. Plans are going ahead for a visit to the American Museum outside Bath, billed as the finest collection of decorative artefacts outside the US. Also a Christmas trip to Waddeston Manor and a chance to hear some inspiring speakers at the Worcestershire ACM in Malvern are in the offing. We heard a report of our recent trip to Bonterre Farm at Top Barn, a fantastic local venture for disadvantaged children, where we learnt about their work, but also had the opportunity to make lavender wreaths and eat a cream tea! One member, who had won our annual bursary, described her weekend course in exotic salads at Denman College. Arrangements for the annual jumble sale next month were initiated and we started the process of looking for our next committee and President as the current incumbent reaches the end of her three years.

Tony Hale was our visiting speaker this month and, somewhat surprisingly, given the serious nature of his talk, “Transplantation: the gift of life”, he opened proceedings with three jokes at the expense of politicians, churchmen and NHS consultants, which gently poked fun at, respectively, vanity, immorality and greed. What followed was an intriguing mix of factual information and personal reminiscence and experience. Tony is a triumphant survivor of 27 years from his kidney transplant and his gratitude for the gift of his life was plain. Nevertheless, he was there not only to inform us, but to deliver a stark message and a plea. He was not trying to persuade those who have any issue with becoming a donor to do so, but he was imploring those of us on the register to make sure that our relatives will back up our wishes. Six out of ten families override the patient’s wishes – a factor which is contributing to the death of three or four people every day in this country, lives which could otherwise be saved.

Tony took us through the history of transplantation, from the autograft (transplant from one part of the body to another) of skin to rebuild the ruined faces of burned airmen in World War Two, through allografts (transplants between people) such as the heart transplant by Christian Barnard in South Africa in 1967 onwards, to the massive leaps forward in the development of anti-rejection drugs, which have revolutionised the survival rates. Along the way, we gleaned some fascinating little nuggets: kidney recipients do not have their non-functioning kidneys removed and there is a Belgian man today who has seven kidneys (!) after repeated transplants.



Then we moved on to Tony's own story. His family have a genetic propensity for polycystic kidneys, which results in the destruction of kidney function. Tony lost his own mother at the age of 50 to the condition and developed it himself in the 1980s. He explained what it was like to live with kidney failure: the exhaustion – being unable to tie shoe laces without a rest; the diet – no potatoes, no chocolate, no cheese, no avocado, because the potassium would kill you, only 100g of protein (boiled chicken or white fish) a day and, the real crippler, only 100ml of fluid in 24 hours. He vomited regularly, found stairs nigh on impossible and needed dialysis once his kidney function had dropped to 2% in one kidney and 4% in the other. In 1990 he had his transplant, a “cadaverous” transplant from a young man killed in a motor cycle accident. And from then on, he “got his life back”, worked, earned, raised his children, paid his taxes, was “a citizen” again.

But at a price. Tony made light of it, but apparently the immuno-suppressant drugs have some pretty dreadful side-effects. He has regular skin cancers removed, before they become dangerous, burnt out by liquid nitrogen, which he says is very painful. As a side anecdote he told us of two contrasting consultants who carried out this procedure – the one who tortured him with cricket stories whilst cheerfully, and slowly, burning out these lesions and the one who started the session by putting the liquid nitrogen on his own skin to remind himself of the pain he was about to inflict and that he must move swiftly. The drugs also make recipients of transplants more vulnerable to stroke and heart attack: several TIAs (mini-strokes) later, we learnt how alarming these are.



And then the heartening story (apart from his, of course): the 85 year old woman who decided she really wasn't making use of both kidneys, so donated one. A nine-year old girl received it. They are both alive and well four years later. And the poignant story: Hope Lee, one of twins, lived for 74 minutes, but six children are alive today because her parents were brave enough to give their consent to her organs being used.

And how did Tony finish? Well, upbeat. Years ago, when he first started doing these talks to raise money for the renal unit at Queen Elizabeth's, he asked advice of a seasoned speaker. Her advice was simple: ABC – Always Be Cheerful. He was. What a remarkable man.