



Multiple Sclerosis Society

17 April 2009

Dear MS Society Scotland member,

You may well have seen last week's media coverage of JK Rowling's decision to step down as the patron of MS Society Scotland. This very sad news came after a difficult time for the Society in Scotland. We know many members have concerns about what has happened. We seek to address these concerns now.

MS Society Scotland, through the combined efforts of staff and volunteers, has achieved much over the years, fighting hard to improve the support available to people living with MS in Scotland. The Society is delivering very good work through its many branches across Scotland and via its national office in Edinburgh, but we know there are areas for improvement.

Over the past year the Society in Scotland has seen a number of serious governance issues – questions over how the charity is run in line with its legal requirements.

Looking at how we got here, the Board suspended the powers of the Scottish Council in September 2008 because the Council of MS Society Scotland refused – despite repeated requests – to address effectively a number of serious staffing, governance and operational issues.

A mediation process followed, in which representatives of the Council and Board worked together to try to get the Society in Scotland back on track. This included several new members joining the Council. Sadly, this process failed and the Board decided at their April meeting to withdraw the Council's powers. This decision will stand until the Society's ongoing UK-wide governance review (which you may have read about in MS Matters and in MS Connect) concludes.

Since the withdrawal of powers, most members of the former Scottish Council have agreed to actively work with us on an individual basis over the next few months to make sure the governance review is a success and to contribute to specific pieces of the Society's work. We welcome their continuing commitment. The Trustees are very keen to get the MS Society Scotland's governance back on a firm footing, and work to improve further the services for people living with MS in Scotland. We are sure the Society's members will want to help us in this process.

In 2007, the Council supported the MS Society's strategy ('Putting the pieces together to beat MS'). This asserts that leading and managing our internationally renowned research portfolio and providing authoritative information (eg the MS Essentials publications) can only be effective if led at UK level. But some things can only be effectively led in Scotland. There are four different systems of health and social care in the four nations of the UK, and the Society operates very successfully in England, Cymru and Northern Ireland with local leadership on issues of support and raising the standards of care.

Looking to the future, we want to see the Society in Scotland build on what it does well but also address, for example, relatively low levels of public awareness of the MS Society in Scotland, the need to grow larger and stronger membership, and also to significantly increase income. Governance arrangements in the future need to more closely reflect the needs, hopes and aspirations of all those living with MS in Scotland.

At this difficult time, we would ask you to join us in taking the Society forward to do more for people living with MS in Scotland. We have suffered a very public setback, but the fantastic commitment of our volunteers in Scotland and the engagement of our members is the real face of the MS Society. MS Week (starting 27 April) is the ideal opportunity for all of us to show the positive work of the Society at local level in Scotland.

The Board believe strongly that it is time to stop internal bickering and concentrate on the real business of the MS Society – to fight MS throughout the UK. With your help, we can all be stronger.

There are opportunities for members to have their say on this as part of our ongoing governance review, at an Open Forum we are planning in Scotland in early September, and at the UK MS Society AGM on 13 September.

There is much more background in the enclosed document, but if you want to know more, the Society's Chief Executive Simon Gillespie will be delighted to talk to you. Please call Magdoline Tadros on 020 8438 0738 and make the arrangements.

You, our members, rather than a few individuals will always have the final say in how the MS Society is constituted and run.

Yours sincerely



Tony Kennan OBE
Chair



Simon Gillespie
Chief Executive