

## **Blue Plaque ceremony in honour of Mary McMaster (Luke Ponsonby)**

I am grateful to the Blue Plaques Board and to all of you for allowing me to say a few words about St Luke's Hospital, one of the two impressive organisations set up by the visionary founder Mary McMaster, the other of course being McMaster House.

The origins of St Luke's Home were at 20 Linton Road in North Oxford which was leased by Mary in 1957, and where she could nurse up to 20 sick, elderly or disabled patients. That lease was not renewed by St John's College so in 1971 she acquired our present site here in Headington with her personal funds, and then after a prolonged struggle to raise the necessary funds to build the new hospital, the patients in the old nursing home eventually arrived here in 1982.

Mary had a vision for a facility that should support a patient from hospital to home, supporting their full recovery and enabling confidence to help each person to live as independently as possible. This is still at the centre of what we do and our exceptional team of staff enable us to take patients from the NHS who have a particularly high level of nursing needs or require intensive physiotherapy in order to return home. Physiotherapy was Mary's own background and that is still reflected in the size of the 'gym' and the number of physiotherapists. We also have a charming chapel and although we don't have morning prayers any more as they used to have at the Community of St Luke's, the Christian values of love and care for others that Mary demonstrated remain very strong.

A few years ago as you will be well aware we brought a rather tired looking 1970s style building into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, adding another floor with 20 new bedrooms taking our capacity up to 63 (we are now running at around 90% occupancy), and also adding a garden room, an activities room and a training room. We also have a garden lovingly tended by Sylvia for the past 25 years, and enjoyed by the residents of McMaster House. Since 2019 St Luke's has continued to help to alleviate the bed-blocking situation in the acute trust

hospitals nearby, including operating as one of the few Designated Settings in the region during Covid looking after patients in an isolated unit. As well as the rehabilitation of short-term patients we look after long-term residents and have a number of consultants that operate from clinics on the ground floor. We also undertake palliative care and manage contracts for the Oxford University Hospitals and the Clinical Commissioning Group – just under half of our beds are funded by the NHS.

So the work and mission that Mary initiated continues to this day in a similar vein, she was a remarkably determined lady with a clear vision and I hope that she would approve of how both St Luke's Hospital and McMaster House have both evolved.