



Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board

**Annual Report
2006**

Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board
The Adelphi, 1-11 John Adam Street, London WC2N 6HT
Tel. 020 7962 8982
Website www.dlaab.org.uk

The Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board
Is an independent advisory body,
established under the Disability Living Allowance
and Disability Working Allowance Act 1991.

Its remit was confirmed under section 175 of the
Social Security Administration Act 1992.

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THE DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

CHAIRMAN

Mrs Anne Spaight MBE

VICE CHAIR

Dr Ian McGill

MEMBERS

Dr. Amit Arora
Mrs Simone Baker
Dr David Cohen (until November 2005)
Mrs Jean Cooper
Mrs Judith Holt
Ms Marilyn Howard
Dr Ben Ko
Dr Mohammad Obaidullah
Dr Audrey Oppenheim
Dr. Ronald Pearce
Ms Sarah Playforth
Mrs Clair Poole
Mr Douglas Ross
Professor David Scott
Professor Tom Sensky
Mrs Sarah Vines
Mrs Marion Westacott
Mrs Christine Whitehead

SECRETARIAT

Mrs Lynne Bell
Mrs Lorraine Wildash
Ms Rosalind Emberson (until March 2006)
Mr John Hicks (from March 2006)
Ms Terri Cooper

FOREWORD

By Mrs Anne Spaight MBE

This has been another busy year for the Board and I am pleased to have much to report.

The Board is always keen to hear the views of those bodies who work with, and for, Disabled People and during the period covered by this Annual Report we have met representatives from the British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association, MIND, and the Scottish Mental Health Association.

In May 2005 the Board was commissioned to produce a study of claims for DLA where the main disabling condition is Learning Disabilities/Difficulties. The last sample of claim forms was reviewed on 18 July. Work on the report will start shortly.

Education remains an important part of the Board's remit. We continue to produce the DLAAB News and Update, an occasional periodical aimed at Decision Makers containing articles by members of the Board drawing on their expertise. Further issues are planned and I would personally like to record my appreciation of the work undertaken by my colleague Clair Poole in producing the News and Update. I would also invite Decision Makers to contact Clair through the Secretariat with requests for articles on particular subjects. If you have not seen any of the News and Updates I urge you to look on the publications page of the DLAAB website www.dlaab.org.uk

Following the success of a seminar for Decision Makers held in September 2005 plans are in hand for a second seminar to take place on 26 October 2006 in Norcross.

During the year I had the opportunity to attend a training day organised by the Social Security Commissioners. I found this a very interesting day, so much so that I asked that the Commissioners be invited to address the June 2006 Full Board Meeting and I am pleased to say that Howard Levenson accepted the invitation and provided some interesting information on the work of the Social Security Commissioners to DLAAB members.

On 21 March 2006 Peter Hain, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, in his statement on the review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland announced that "The functions of the Disability Living Allowance Board (NI) will transfer to the equivalent GB body, whose remit will be extended." Inevitably this will have an effect on the working of the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board (GB) although as yet the precise nature of that change is not known. Officials in the two Boards secretariats are working together to ensure a smooth transition from two boards to one Board. I would hope to report fully on this in the 2007 annual report.

As always there are some changes in personnel to report on. The Board said goodbye to Dr. David Cohen. His successor as Board member with a practical knowledge of geriatric medicine is Dr. Amit Arora. We have also welcomed Dr Ronald Pearce to the Board. Particular mention should be made of Ros Emberson who retired from the Secretariat after working for 13 years in support of the Board.

Finally, the work that the Board produces is very dependent on the quality, enthusiasm and hard work of all its members, and the Secretariat, without whom all of us would flounder. I am very grateful to everyone for their help and support in developing the reputation and success of DLAAB and look forward to further success in the coming year.

Anne Spaight

INTRODUCTION

The Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board (the Board) is an independent advisory body, established under the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Act 1991. Its remit was confirmed under section 175 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992. We provide independent advice to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and doctors, who are contracted to provide medical advice and examination services to the Department for Work and Pensions (Medical Service doctors), on matters relating to Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance.

THE BOARD'S REMIT

The statutory powers governing the Board's work are set out in section 3(1) of the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Act 1991. The constitution and administration of the Board are set out in Section 175 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992. We have three roles:

- to give advice to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on matters he refers to them concerning DLA and AA
- to give advice to Medical Service doctors on cases referred for expert advice
- to present an Annual Report on its activities over the year to the Secretary of State.

The Board currently holds three Full Board meetings a year, during the period covered by this report it met on 11 October 2005, 14 February 2006 and 13 June 2006.

During the year groups of members may meet as necessary in a small board session to consider matters referred by Ministers or requests for advice on specific disabilities or conditions.

In addition, the Board:

- holds meetings with organisations of and for disabled people;
- performs an educational function.

This report, which covers the period 1 August 2005 to 31 July 2006, is prepared with the support of the Department for Work and Pensions, for which the Board is most grateful. The views expressed are, however, solely those of the Board.

COMPOSITION OF THE BOARD

The Board consists of a Chairman appointed by the Secretary of State and not less than 11 and not more than 20 members.

Legislation requires that the members appointed by the Secretary of State shall include members with professional knowledge or experience of:

- physiotherapy
- occupational therapy
- social work
- nursing people with disabilities
- medical practice.

The Board shall also include six or more members who are disabled and at least one member who cares for a disabled person.

The current Board comprises one Chairman and 17 members. In addition to considerable expertise in many areas of disability, including access and equality for disabled people, the Board has professional expertise in the following areas:

- Care of elderly
- Child/adolescent psychiatry
- General Practice
- General Medicine
- Malignant diseases
- Neurology
- Nursing
- Occupational therapy
- Paediatrics
- Physiotherapy
- Psychiatry
- Rehabilitation
- Rheumatology
- Social work

Working Groups

In order to assist its work and utilise members' skills and expertise to the best effect the Board has been organised into three working groups: Education; Organisation and the recently renamed Information & Development Group. Each group is led by a group coordinator.

The Education Group co-ordinator is Clair Poole. The Education Group has taken on responsibility for the production and editing of DLAAB News and Up-date, a regular paper aiming to inform Decision Makers and others on topical matters pertaining to DLA and AA. The Group is also responsible for the management of the DLAAB web-site, up-dating as necessary. During the past 12 months two issues have been published and distributed to Decision Makers. These latest and past editions can be viewed on the DLAAB website.

The Organisation Group is co-ordinated by Marion Westacott. The Group is responsible for the induction of new members, ensuring that they are aware of the Board's role and responsibilities, and are familiar with the way the Board conducts its business. All members of the group are able to provide a proper induction to any new members of the Board. The Group has over this past year reviewed the appraisal form devised for Board members to complete on an annual basis, and has made some suggestions to improve the system. This system is up and running and proving to be successful. The Group is also responsible for identifying possible outside organisations which would be interested in meeting with the Board, and the Board has met with three organisations this year.

The recently re-vamped Information & Development Group (formerly known as the Research and Assessment Group) is led by Sarah Vines and Tom Sensky. The Group has responsibility for informing and helping the activities of the Board by identifying and disseminating up-to-date research findings where it impacts on the Board's work. It will be, in particular, responding to the given commissions, drawing the attention of the Board to issues around disability where it is relevant to the benefit, and will responding to any information needs from the other Groups as necessary. This new look Group will be at the very centre of the coming year's activities.

Term of Office

The Chairman and other members of the Board shall hold office for a period of not more than five years, as the Secretary of State shall determine. Any member, however:

- shall be eligible for re-appointment from time to time on or after the expiration of their term of office; and
- may, by notice in writing to the Secretary of State, resign office at any time, while remaining eligible for re-appointment.

Removal

The Secretary of State may remove the Chairman or any other member of the Board on the grounds of their inability to discharge their function or because of misconduct.

Annex 1 outlines the profiles of the current membership of the Board.

THE BOARD

FULL BOARD MEETINGS

11 October 2005. The Board was delighted to be able to welcome Anne McGuire MP, Minister for Disabled People to the meeting. The Minister explained the Government's thinking behind individual budgets, which is to put people at the centre of how services are delivered to them. She also explained about the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 which, amongst other things, places a new duty on the public sector to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people, and stated that the Board has a role to play in this. The Board was addressed by Terry Moran, Chief Executive of the Disability and Carers Service (DCS). His address covered the vision and strategy of the DCS. He went on to say how he valued the advice and seminars provided by the Board for Decision Makers. The Board was given an update about the proposed accreditation system to be introduced to Decision Makers.

14 February 2006. The Board were given an update on DLA/AA policy matters and were invited to contribute articles for future publication of the News and Update. The Board then received a briefing on the new Customer Care Management (CCM) System from the Departments Corporate Medical Group. This included an explanation of Customer Care Management and how, with the use of Information Technology, it could be used by Decision Makers.

13 June 2006. Howard Levinson of the Social Security Commissioners was invited to talk to the Board about the Commissioners' work. Mr Levinson explained that Social Security Commissioners were Judges of Circuit Judge level and their remit was to decide on points of law that had arisen from tribunal decisions. He went on to discuss topics of interest in cases that had come before the Commissioners that concerned the interpretation of Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance legislation on entitlement. The Board also received an update on DLA and work and had confirmation that DLA can be paid to both those in and out of employment. Work had been done in policy division to ensure that leaflets were clear on this point. The Board also received an update on issues covered by the Welfare Reform Bill.

CONSULTATIONS WITH ORGANISATIONS OF AND FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

The Board is always keen to meet national organisations of and for disabled people to discuss issues on DLA and AA that fall within the Board's statutory remit. Board members welcome these opportunities to learn more about a variety of disabilities and discuss matters of mutual interest. The meetings also provide an opportunity to give the organisations some information about the purpose of the Board and for them to put forward their views. The Board very much welcomes hearing from the organisations and is pleased to convey their informed opinions to the Department's policy makers.

The Board met a representative of British Limbless Ex Service Men's Association which promotes the welfare of all those who have lost a limb or one or both eyes as a result of

service to their country and assists their dependants. This was a very interesting meeting in which the issues of disability and an ageing population were discussed

The Board also meet a representative from MIND which works to create a better life for those who experience mental health problems, which can affect anyone from any walk of life. Also at that meeting was a representative of the Scottish Mental Health Association. The Board welcomed the opportunity to hear about the issues for those people with mental health problems and found the discussion very useful.

DLAAB NEWS & UPDATE

The articles in the DLAAB News & Update are written by Board members for the benefit of Decision Makers, and may be written from either professional or personal experience. Articles are designed to give additional information about a variety of conditions or disabilities encountered by Decision Makers, but are not to be used as a basis for decision making in individual cases.

There have been two publications during the year: Issue 6 dated October 2005 included articles on Laryngectomy and the second part of Dr. Ko's article on normal development in children; Issue 7 dated Spring 2006 focused on the features and treatments of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. These articles are designed to enhance the information already available to Decision Makers.

BOARD STUDIES

In January 2004 Maria Eagle, the then Minister for Disabled People, asked the Board to undertake a study of the "special rules" arrangements in Attendance Allowance (AA) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA). The "special rules" enable terminally ill people (i.e. people who have a progressive disease from which their death in consequence of that disease can be reasonably expected within six months) to qualify immediately for higher-rate AA or the highest rate of the DLA care component without having to satisfy the normal entitlement conditions. Those who satisfy the normal entitlement conditions for the DLA mobility component can also receive that component without having to serve the usual three month qualifying period or satisfy the usual six months prospective test.

The terms of reference of the study were:-

To examine the current arrangements for processing special rules AA and DLA claims, with particular reference to the adequacy of the current guidance for Medical Services doctors and decision makers, and to make proposals, if necessary, for changes to the arrangements and guidance:

To investigate the extent to which, if at all, (a) special rules awards of DLA and AA have been made in inappropriate cases (and the proportion of such cases which might qualify for the benefits under the normal entitlement rules), and (b) special rules awards which were appropriate at the time they were made but which might no longer be appropriate (and the proportion of such cases which might qualify for the benefits under the normal entitlement rules) and: to provide advice on:-

-
- The circumstances in which it would be generally appropriate to reconsider special rules awards and the criteria to be used in selecting awards for reconsideration: and
 - Which current special rules awards should be reconsidered.

The Board's findings and recommendations are set out in its report on this study which is available on the DLAAB website www.dlaab.org.uk. In light of the long-standing policy of parity between Great Britain and Northern Ireland in relation to Social Security matters, in reaching its recommendations the Board was pleased to note the Special Rules study undertaken by DLAAB(NI).

The Board has been commissioned by the Corporate Medical Group (now known as the Health and Benefits Division) of the Department for Work and Pensions to look at a sample of DLA applications where learning disabilities/difficulties encompassing both children and adults are the main disabling condition. The Corporate Medical Group requested the Board address the following areas in the study.

- Diagnostic categories/terminology used in claims – is it possible to provide some guidance on distinguishing claims with predominately educational (specific learning difficulties?) and behavioural problems from those with general learning disabilities, and how these might affect entitlement.
- An evaluation of the type and quality of the evidence in claims.
- Whether the severity of the disability (mild, moderate or severe) can be judged in each case with a description of the disabling effects.
- In evaluating the severity of the disability the advisory board was asked to consider what other criteria might be used in reaching a decision.

Having discussed the methodology for the study with the Corporate Medical Group, the Board, working in small groups, reviewed some 41 anonymised claim forms (forms are anonymised so as to ensure confidentiality) over a period of months. To assist with the study a specially designed questionnaire was used to help board members consider the usefulness of the claim pack, any corroborative statement, any professional or educational reports in assessing the level of mobility, the level of attention or supervision needed and the level of disability. The questionnaire also prompted board members to think about what, in each case, was the key criteria in assessing the severity of the disability and what other sources of information might have been helpful.

Having completed the reviewing exercise, the completed questionnaires will be used to inform the report writing process.

LIAISON WITH NORTHERN IRELAND DLAAB

GB DLAAB maintains excellent relations with the Northern Ireland Board and values the contribution from Mr Stanley Miller, the present Chair, at the full board meetings.

It was towards the end of the business year on 21 March 2006 that the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board (Northern Ireland) received a copy of the Government Report

“Final Decisions on the Review of Public Administration”. The report contained the decision that the DLAAB (NI) “functions will transfer to the equivalent Board in Great Britain whose remit will be extended”. Given the planned disestablishment of DLAAB NI sometime in the near future the Board is aiming to maintain that relationship to ensure a smooth handover of functions.

Expenditure

During the 2005/2006 financial year the Board’s expenditure was £46,000. This includes members’ fees and expenses and the general running expenses of the Board.

Governance

The Board continues to follow the guidance from the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments when recruiting new members, and includes an independent assessor on the short-listing and interviewing panel. All vacancies are advertised and appointments are made on merit, taking into account experience and knowledge of various areas of disability.

The Board has set up both a code of practice for Board members and a register of interests of Board members, as recommended by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Website

The Board’s website can be found at www.dlaab.org.uk . This site has recently been redesigned by and any comments on the websites design and content should be sent to DLAAB-Consultation@dwp.gsi.gov.uk .

The Secretariat is always happy to provide copies of the Board’s publications but they are precluded from answering individual queries about benefit claims.

SUMMARY

The Board values the opportunity to use its expertise in the field of disability to assist Decision Makers as much as possible with their difficult role. This is achieved through a variety of ways, including advising on cases referred by medical officers, holding DLAAB workshops and publishing the “DLAAB News & Update”.

The Board is always pleased to meet organisations of and for disabled people, and for the opportunity to hear of the difficulties their members face. At such meetings the Board also explains the criteria for DLA and AA.

Members of the Board welcome requests by the Department to give their advice on specific areas of disability.

ANNEX 1

PROFILES OF BOARD MEMBERS

Chairman

Mrs Anne Spaight, MBE, MA, MCSP

Mrs Spaight was appointed to the Board in May 1997, becoming Deputy Chair in June 1999 and was appointed Chairman in May 2003. A physiotherapist and health management professional with over thirty years of experience of NHS therapy services in various parts of the country, she is currently working as Associate Director of clinical governance for Lincolnshire Ambulance and Health Transport Service NHS Trust. She has a special interest in rheumatology, and has lectured widely on this subject not only in the UK but also overseas in places as varied as Latvia and South Africa.

Vice Chairman

Dr Ian G McGill, MA, BM BCh, FRCP

Dr McGill was appointed to the Board in March 1998. He is now retired from clinical practice, but prior to his retirement he was a Consultant Physician at Torbay Hospital, Torquay, where he was Director of Cancer Services. He has a wide general medical background, and was responsible for the care of patients with AIDS, as well as a wide range of malignant disease. In 1999 he was appointed as an assessor for the Professional Performance Review Panel of the General Medical Council, and has been involved in the setting up of revalidation procedures. In 2001, he was appointed as an assessor by the Commission for Health Improvement. He has a special interest in support services for patients with cancer.

Members

Dr. Amit Arora MD, MRCP, MSc

Dr Arora is a Consultant Physician with interest in Stroke Medicine at the North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust in Stoke-on-Trent. His MD (Medicine and Pharmaco-therapeutics) was on coronary risk factors and his MSc in Geriatric medicine was on the topic of hearing related disability in older people. He deals with people with disability through his work as a geriatrician and a stroke physician. His special interests are in management of acute stroke, risk factor modification and community participation in disease prevention. He is helping with implementing thrombolysis service for acute stroke. He is a module leader for MSc course in Geriatric Medicine at Keele University. He is also a member of BMA Medical Speciality Sub committee.

Mrs Simone Baker

Mrs Baker was appointed to the Board in March 2000. She works in a voluntary capacity for a number of organisations including Vice Chair of the national organisation Disabled Parents Network, member of the West Berkshire Maternity services Liaison Committee, member of the South Eastern Regional Committee for the Big Lottery Fund (formerly the Community Fund) and parent governor at her daughters Primary School. Her past experience involves working for the Thalidomide Society, serving on the Thalidomide Trust's National Advisory Council and serving a year as Chair on the Management Committee at her daughters pre-school. She is a member of the Restricted Growth Association and is a DLA Appeals Tribunal member. Mrs Baker has congenital malformations of all four limbs caused by the drug Thalidomide.

Dr David L Cohen, MB BS, FRCP

Dr Cohen was appointed to the Board in November 1995. He is a Consultant Physician in Care of the Elderly at Northwick Park Hospital, Harrow. He has been a consultant since 1991 and has run stroke units in both Nottingham and Harrow as well as maintaining a general geriatrics practice. He is also actively involved in research in stroke. He is a member of the British Geriatrics Society and the British Association of Stroke Physicians.

Mrs Jean Cooper, BSc Econ, HOLRCC

Mrs Cooper was appointed to the Board in February 1999. She is an experienced social worker initially employed by Manchester Social Services, moving into training, then teaching social work at Sheffield Hallam University. Her current work involves assessing the needs of children with disabilities for the Family Fund and the care needs of severely disabled adults for the Independent Living Fund. She is a member of the Appeals Service and acts as a part time social work tutor for Nottingham Trent University.

Mrs Judith Holt, DipCOT, MAOT, SROT

Mrs Holt was appointed to the Board in September 2001. An occupational therapist she has 28 years experience of working with both physical and mental disability. She is currently working with mentally ill patients, assessing their needs and providing care and treatment within a community mental health team. She was appointed in 1980 to the Mental Health Review Tribunal Service reviewing the detention of patients treated under the Mental Health Act. She has a particular interest in people with mental health problems and their re-integration into the community. Since 2005 she has sat on DLA tribunals as a disability qualified member.

Ms Marilyn Howard, LLB, CQSW, MPhil

Ms Howard was appointed to the Board in February 1999. She is working for the

Disability Rights Commission and is also a freelance social policy analyst, undertaking research and consultancy for universities, voluntary organisations and think tanks. She has also been a policy officer at Disability Alliance and RADAR, researcher to an MP and adviser to two Select Committees. A qualified social worker with law degree and MPhil, she has been employed as a community social worker, welfare rights adviser and probation officer. She was formerly a member of the TGWU disability forum and TUC rehabilitation committee. She is currently a member of the Disability Employment Advisory Committee.

Dr Ben Ko, MB ChB, MRCP, FRCPCH

Dr Ko was appointed to the Board in January 2003. He is a Consultant Community Paediatrician in East London. He has special interests in childhood neurodisability, especially pervasive developmental disorders. As a council member and trustee of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, he contributes to setting national standards for Paediatric practice and training. He was formerly a member of the Appeals Service.

Dr Mohammad Obaidullah, MB BS, FRCOG, FRCGP

Dr Obaidullah was appointed to the Board in November 2004. He is a part-time general practitioner, with a special interest in obstetrics and gynaecology, dermatology and palliative care. He is a member of the local Research Ethics Committee in Swansea and a member of the Multi Research Ethics Committee for Wales. Dr Obaidullah is a member of the Appeals Service and an associate member of the General Medical Council and sits on Fitness to Practice panels. He also works as a GP appraiser for the University Of Wales College Of Medicine, and is a volunteer on the Doctor's Support Line and past President of the Bridgend Rotary Club. He has recently been appointed as Clinical Adviser to the Statutory Committees of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and a Peer Reviewer of the Health Care Inspectorate Wales.

Dr Audrey Oppenheim, BSc, MB, ChB, FRCPsych

Dr Oppenheim was appointed to the Board in January 2001. She is a Consultant in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at The Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital Trust, and her special interests include liaison psychiatry, the assessment of children with attentional difficulties and family therapy. She is a professional advisor to the National Youth Advocacy Service. Dr Oppenheim is involved in the development of community based services in inner city Liverpool and the team is now based in a local Sure Start. She retains close links with paediatrics.

Dr Ronald Pearce

Dr Ronald Pearce is Consultant Neurologist at Charing Cross Hospital and West Middlesex University Hospital and Honorary Senior Lecturer in Neuropathology and

Clinical Director of the UK Parkinson's Disease Society Tissue Bank at Imperial College. He runs specialist clinics in Epilepsy, Parkinson's disease and other movement disorders and also Botulinum Toxin Injection clinics for treatment of focal dystonias and other related involuntary movement disorders. He formerly directed the Neurorehabilitation Unit at Charing Cross Hospital. He has a PhD based on research into the Neuropharmacology of Parkinson's disease and his ongoing research interests include brain changes in Parkinson's disease and psychiatric disorders, including schizophrenia and depression.

Ms Sarah Playforth, MCLIP, DipPSM, DipITEC

Ms Playforth was appointed to the Board in November 2003. She is a freelance access, diversity and equalities trainer/consultant and has worked in this field since leaving her post as Chief Librarian in a new unitary authority in 1988. She has been a lay member on Employment Tribunals since 2000. A chartered librarian and holder of diplomas in public service management, anatomy, physiology and body massage, she has over 20 years experience as a volunteer, Trustee, middle and senior manager in both the statutory and independent sectors, managing and developing public library services and equal access to them, and researching, planning and campaigning for equality of access and inclusion in society for D/deaf and disabled people. Sarah is deaf.

Mrs Clair Poole

Mrs Poole was appointed to the Board in March 2000 and re-appointed in March 2003. She has Multiple Sclerosis which has caused increasing levels of disability. A landscape artist, her past experience of committee work covers issues of health and welfare, provisions for sport and play and education through play for the up to five age group. She has understanding reached by living with a disability and believes access is essential to equality.

Mr Douglas Ross

Mr Ross was appointed to the Board in November 2003. He has worked in the disability sector since 1990, principally in the field of employment in relation to disabled people. He currently works for the Leonard Cheshire Foundation on their award winning 'Workability' project having previously worked for the RNIB and the Government's Employment Service (now Jobcentre Plus) Disability Service. He is a former member of the British Computer Society Disability Group Committee and the Greater London Employment Network on Disability Working Group. He has been disabled since birth as a result of spina bifida.

Professor David L Scott, BSc, MD, FRCP

Professor Scott was appointed to the Board in January 2003. He is an academic rheumatologist leading an integrated team of eight medical and six nursing staff who deliver specialist care at King's College Hospital. He also provides academic leadership for an integrated clinical and laboratory research team of nearly 40 research staff. The main thrust of his own research work is to improve outcome and reducing disability in arthritis by providing optimal medical care. Prior to

joining the Board he had edited Rheumatology, the leading European specialist journal in the field for 5 years. He is heavily involved with patient groups including Arthritis Care and the Myositis Support Group and is a member of the executive of the Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance, an umbrella organisation of patient and professional groups.

Professor Tom Sensky, PhD, MB BS, FRCPsych

Professor Sensky was appointed to the Board in April 2004. He is Professor of Psychological Medicine at Imperial College London, and Honorary Consultant Psychiatrist at West London Mental Health NHS Trust. Most of his clinical work involves psychiatric or psychological problems concerned with employment, or the psychological aspects of chronic illness, physical as well as mental. His research has focussed on the understanding and management of psychological problems associated with a variety of long-term illnesses, ranging from rheumatoid arthritis to schizophrenia. He regularly gives lectures or workshops to doctors, medical students and others on a variety of topics. He has a particular interest in evidence-based practice, and regularly runs workshops on this in the UK and elsewhere.

Mrs Sarah Vines

Mrs Vines was appointed to the Board in July 2004. She qualified as a physiotherapist in 1988, since when she has worked in the acute, community and voluntary sectors. She works for Croydon PCT wheelchair service, working with adults and Children with disabilities. She also acts as a freelance assessor for Access to Work and as a physiotherapist for North East Surrey MS Society. Her main professional interest has been with adults with acquired neuro-disability. In the course of her work she has dealt with many people who have become disabled and has assisted them with applications for benefits and other services.

Mrs Marion Westacott, Dip Couns, Cert Ed.

Mrs Westacott was appointed to the Board in June 1998. She is an employee counsellor and disability awareness trainer, currently working for local NHS hospital, community and mental health trusts. She is actively involved with several charities for learning disability and communication disorders in children and young people. Mrs Westacott is a carer for her son who has autism and is herself partially sighted.

Mrs Christine Whitehead, RGN, RSCN, BA(Hons)

Mrs Whitehead was appointed to the Board in October 1998. She is an HIV Nurse Consultant at a teaching hospital in the North West. Her special interest is the management of HIV as a chronic condition and she works closely with a local service user's support group. Her experience in the NHS includes discharge planning, care of the elderly and general medicine. Mrs Whitehead has personal experience of caring for a disabled person and is a member of the Appeals Service.