

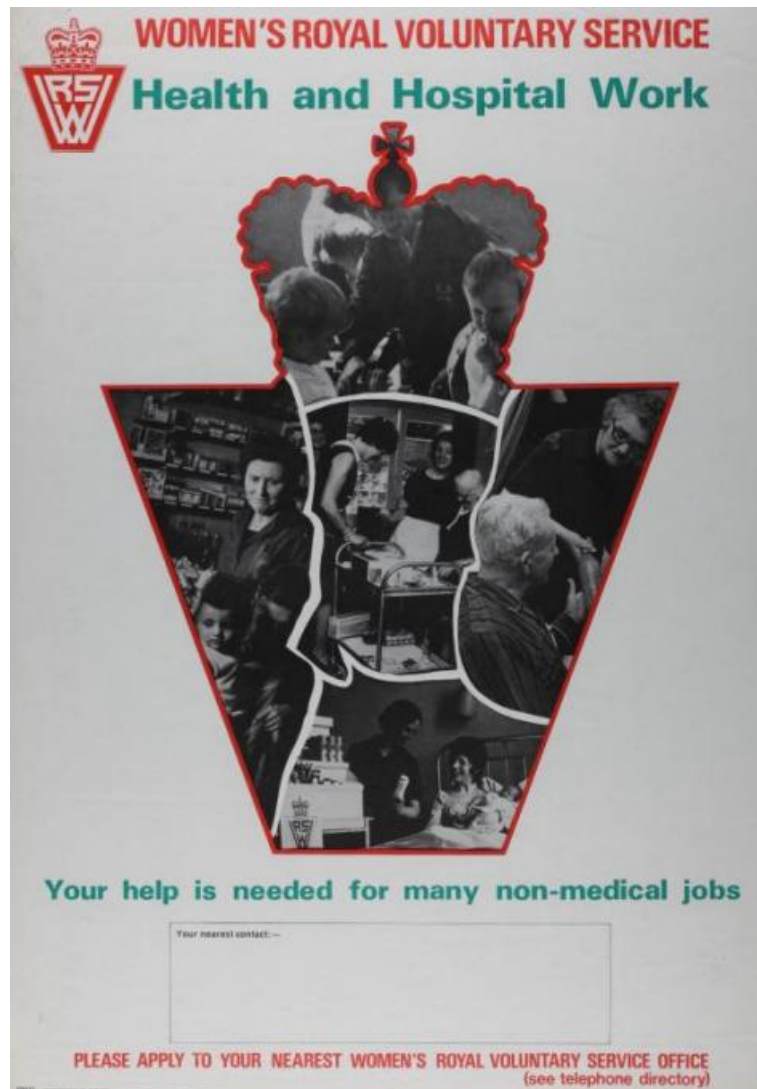
WELFARE WORK IN HOSPITALS 1938-2013

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE HERITAGE COLLECTION

Summary

WVS began working in hospitals in 1938 to assist with preparations for war, where volunteers would be needed to fill staff shortages in non-medical jobs, to help with emergencies and recruit people to fulfil specific jobs such as ward maids or ambulance drivers. During the Second World War WVS volunteers assisted with: Hospital Supply Depots; feeding; domestic work; recruitment and training; fundraising and hospital libraries. In the post-war period it was assumed that volunteer numbers in hospitals would decrease as staff returned to their post. WVS volunteers, however, continued to provide their services and expanded on areas such as feeding and fundraising.

The organisation's post-war focus was on how it could assist with the aims of the National Health Service (NHS). Any roles members took on were to benefit patients as well as the hospital and included: reception work; canteens; trolley shops and shopping services; special campaigns, children's wards, help in psychiatric hospitals and the Hospital Car Scheme. Over the years these roles changed and developed with the needs and policies of the NHS as well as the needs and priorities of the individual hospitals and their patients.



WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/PUB/HH/PSTR-HH-010

Introduction

'It is an especial consolation to women who cannot volunteer for any of the more spectacular or active forms of National Service to know that there is an important field of work open to them in the manufacture of Hospital Supplies. It will give them added encouragement if they feel that their work can be scientifically and efficiently organised so that the best possible results may be achieved.'

Stella Reading ¹

The WVS Health and Hospitals Department was established in 1938 to assist local authorities with welfare work. Its work in hospitals began by focusing on services that would assist with the war effort and staff shortages or which would expand services they already provided outside of hospitals; for example making hospital supplies, recruiting auxiliary nurses and feeding injured servicemen. Although a number of other organisations, including St. John's Ambulance, already volunteered in hospitals there was still plenty WVS could do or provide volunteers for in conjunction with those other voluntary groups.

¹ RVS A&HC, 60/1, Hospital Supplies General Correspondence, How to Start a Hospital Depot, Published by The Central Hospital Supply Service, 1939



A WRVS member of the hospital escort service Derby, Derbyshire. 1950s

WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/P/HH/EST002

War work in hospitals

During the Second World War, volunteers acted as hospital helps to assist with staff shortages, emergency work and Civil Defence. This involved: Mending linen; staffing canteens; answering telephones; acting as clerical assistants and undertaking 'other duties of every kind'. ²

Hospital supply depots

In January 1939 a number of voluntary organisations started to look into the possibility of volunteer run Hospital Supply Depots ³. The National Service Handbook, which was due for publication, was expected to ask for volunteers to sign up in that particular area. The handbook stated that hospital supply workers should be 'older women who were prepared to do work with their hands in the preparation of hospital supplies, dressings, swabs, bandages, etc'. ⁴

The initiative was started by the League of Remembrance and members of the WVS were encouraged to join the League if they were interested in hospital work. ⁵

At the same time WVS carried out its own investigations into the need for volunteers in supply depots in peace and war time. It was found that in a period of peace hospitals did not want volunteers to be making supplies and in some cases were even reluctant to involve them in times of emergency.

However at the start of the Second World War, especially in London, an increasing number of hospitals asked for volunteers to help with work in supplies. The British Red Cross Society (BRCS) and the Joint Emergency War Council organised training and working conditions for WVS Volunteers appointed to supply depots.

² Report of ten years work

³ These organisations included the BRCS, WVS and the Personal Services League

⁴ RVS A&HC, 60/1, op, cit., 1939

⁵ The League of Remembrance was started in 1915 to help in the Central War Hospital Department, after World War I it continued this work and expanded in to civilian hospitals. <http://leagueofremembrance.org.uk/history/>

By 28th August 1939 there were 80,000 members ready to work in hospital supplies. One factor as to why so many women were prepared or appointed to do this work was the change in plans to evacuation, as fewer people were expected to use the scheme. In early 1939, Cornwall expected 20,000 evacuees but by August were anticipating the arrival of only 5,000. ⁶

The role of volunteers in the supply depots in war time were:

- The reception of materials from manufacturers through Central Hospital Supply Service (CHSS) HQ
- Issue of materials to depots
- Reception and collection of reports from depots
- Reception of requisitions from CHSS HQ
- Allocation of orders to depots
- Forwarding of reports to CHSS HQ
- The stocking of supplies and forwarding them to service units
- Finance
- Records and correspondence with CHSS HQ and depots ⁷

During the Second World War many women carried out these duties in hospitals across Britain, though they were given other duties as part of this work. In September 1942 Bath Hospital Supply Depot volunteers were asked to sew garments for the prisoners of war parcels. They also knitted comforts for the Merchant Navy. ⁸

⁶ RVS A&HC, 60/1, op, cit., Note to Lady Reading from Mrs Huxley, Position of Hospital Supplies in Cornwall, 1939

⁷ RVS A&HC, 60/1, Hospital Supplies General Correspondence

⁸ RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/NR/R7/1942-CB/BTH, September 1942, p.4

Food

WVS was involved in many aspects of feeding service men and civilians during the war. Some of this work crossed over into hospitals such as collecting vegetables for mine-sweepers, surplus fruit and vegetables would be distributed elsewhere.

In July 1944 Tynemouth WVS distributed vegetables and fruit to sailors and other members of HM Forces in the naval hospital and Tynemouth Infirmary, where there were 78 Normanby boys ⁹.

Supplies included cabbage, turnips, red currents and gooseberries. ¹⁰ Mobile canteens situated in train stations would also provide refreshments to hospital trains which were transporting casualties. In The Bulletin, March 1940, a member wrote about a demonstration exercise:

‘A hospital train pulled into the siding. Stretcher-bearers clambered out. They set their stretchers down and the casualties came to life and converged upon us. We were surrounded. “Coffee? Tea? Soup?” The soup came out of the tap in a reddish gush into the white mug. An aged man conspicuously labelled fractured femur sniffed at it with the sagacity of an ancient fox-hound. “Tomato soup”, I improvised. “Or would you rather have tea?” fractured Femur nodded. I drew off a mugful from the other urn. It swirled into the mug with a deep and greenish look, as if from the dark backward and abysm of time. “WVS colours, huh?” said a voice in the crowd.’¹¹

Recruitment & training

WVS covered a number of non-medical roles alongside taking responsibility for the training of women for specialist roles. From 1938 as part of their ARP work WVS helped to recruit Auxiliary Nurses. It was thought that around 500,000 women would have to be recruited for this work; they were usually around 50-60 years old and had

⁹ Normanby Boys were men who signed up from the village of Normanby in North Yorkshire

¹⁰ RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/NR/R1/1944-CB/TYN, Report on distribution of vegetables to minesweepers, small naval craft and hospitals, July

¹¹ RVS A&HC, Bulletin Mar 1940 Caravan Canteen p.7

a nursing background.¹² This was to enable women who could not take part in other forms of National Service to contribute to the war effort.

WVS also arranged training, provided by the BRCS, to help women to qualify for the Hospital Certificate. This work continued throughout the war and in some areas large numbers were recruited for example in 1940 Camberwell WVS recruited 100 women.¹³

As well as recruiting auxiliary nurses in York members managed the Casualty Information Bureau, set up to answer enquiries and keep records in the event of emergencies such as air raids. Women were also trained as ambulance drivers in areas such as Cannock, Skyrack and Gosport.¹⁴

Funding for hospitals

Although the organisation did not fundraise for its own purposes many volunteers would raise money for charitable causes and local institutions. In Beverley, East Yorkshire, the centre ran a Hospital Helps Scheme at the base hospital. The girls who joined were too young to officially be in WVS but helped by acting as messengers, tidying cupboards and making swabs. They also raised money for the hospital organising a dance, the proceeds totalled £17 8s 2d.¹⁵

Domestic work

In 1939 WVS began to recruit domestic workers for mobile canteens and first aid posts, though there were soon many requests for more of these workers to be assigned to hospitals. WVS were asked by the Ministry of Health to recruit ward maids, porters, clerical workers, linen room maids and cooks for hospitals, a process they had already started before the official request came in. Of the 223,928

¹² RVS A&HC, 58/6, Letter June 17th 1938

¹³ RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/NR/R12/1940-LON/CBW MB, Narrative Reports – Camberwell, 01/01/1940-01/12/1940

¹⁴ RVS A&HC, Bulletin Oct/Nov 1939

¹⁵ RVS A&HC, 953/5, Report on the work of the WVS Hospital Helps Beverley E. Yorks, 1940-1942.

members that had joined the WVS before June 1939, 33,225 were engaged in hospital work and around 16,000 were engaged in domestic work in hospitals.¹⁶

By 1941 volunteers recruited for domestic work were performing a variety of roles. Some members worked night shifts in hospitals; one 80 year old volunteer in Southampton would wait on doctors in the common room from midnight to 3am.¹⁷

In January 1942 volunteers in Oxford were helping in the nurses' home each night in the dining room with suppers and then the washing up. At the Radcliffe Infirmary 2,602 drinks were served by WVS in the out-patients department. This type of work continued through the war in Bath in 1944 for example 25 members volunteered in St. Martins Kitchens.

When the war ended there was less of a need for WVS to recruit volunteers for this type of work, however, the Ministry of Labour and National Service asked for this work to carry on, to provide workers for the Displaced Persons for Hospital Domestic Work Scheme.¹⁸

The Displaced Persons for Hospital Domestic Work Scheme was established in 1946 to recruit women from the Baltic States who were in displacement camps in Germany and could not return home. They were recruited by the Ministry of Labour for work in sanatoriums across Britain.

In 1946 and 1947 WVS was engaged in providing interpreters and escorts for these women who were relocated to reception centres Britain. Members also provided other assistances at these centres such as providing clothing to those who needed it.¹⁹ Transport was also required for new arrivals to take them to their new place of work and accommodation, in most cases this was arranged by WVS volunteers. In

¹⁶ RVS A&HC, 60/2/1, Hospital Cooks and Ward Maids Etc. Recruitment of Displaced Persons For Hospital Domestic Work. 1939 -1947, Allocation of Women's Voluntary Services Enrolments for 1939, Note to Statistics Department, 15 June 1939, Note on Statistics 16 June 1939

¹⁷ RVS A&HC, Bulletin Sept 1944, centre flashes p.8

¹⁸ RVS A&HC, 60/2/1, op, cit., WVS Work in Hospitals 1944,

¹⁹ RVS A&HC, 60/2/1, op, cit., Technical Instructions No.8

1946, Manchester WVS assisted with registering Baltic women who had been sent from the reception areas in London.

This involved issuing rationing and clothing books. A bus was also organised to take the women to the sanatoriums just outside Manchester.²⁰ Over the next few years this scheme developed into welfare for European Voluntary Workers as WVS started to extend the same help to 'other classes of workers'.²¹

WVS did not continue to recruit British domestic workers for Hospitals in the postwar era; however, they did provide services very similar to those given by the domestic workers they had enlisted. These jobs were done under new titles and many made official WVS services, often at the request of the Ministry of Health.

Post-war work in hospitals

When the war came to an end, and hospital staff started to return to work, it was supposed there would be less of a requirement for volunteers in hospitals. A number of other organisations such as the BRCS were also working in hospitals and WVS was instructed not to overlap that current work. However WVS developed a range of services for the benefit of patients' physical and mental wellbeing as well as supporting the hospitals' needs.

Reception work

Volunteers worked on receptions in hospitals answering telephones, covering night workers and answering patient queries. They also manned information desks in many hospitals across Britain to assist patients. In most hospitals volunteers were doing such a good job on their receptions they were asked to assist with other domestic work, such as laundry, usually done by staff.

The County Organiser for Hampshire commented in 1962 that 'The Winchester Hospital Reception Scheme is working so well and Matron has such confidence in WVS that we have been asked to do all the washing up for the Maternity Ward while their kitchen is being re-organised.' The Hampshire County Organiser felt that WVS

²⁰ RVS A&HC, 60/2/1, op, cit., Domestic Work for Displaced person in Region 10, September 1946.

²¹ Report of ten years work

would be required for longer than the month specified by the hospital as at that point the hospital did not have the funds for extra domestic help to take on the task. ²²

Libraries

Libraries were established in civilian hospitals just after World War I by BRCS and St. John's Ambulance. During the Second World War, WVS helped to staff libraries and book trolleys in hospitals. One notable volunteer was Winston Churchill's daughter Mary who helped at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. ²³

After the war, WVS began to run their own libraries in hospitals though the service remained dominated by BRCS and St. John's Ambulance. Volunteers usually opened the libraries twice a week and ran a trolley service on the wards. Volunteers were expected to be business like in keeping the records, have an interest in books and reading and listen to patients opinions on reading to help them stock the library. In Withington Hospital library, for instance, 1,000 new books were purchased in 1951 as 1,400 books were taken out every month by some of the 950 patients. ²⁴

²² RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/NR/R6/1962-HAMP/HAMP CO, Narrative Reports – Hampshire County Office, July-Dec

²³ 23 RVS A&HC, 69/4, British Red Cross And Order Of St John Hospital Library Emergency Committee 1939 - 1944

²⁴ RVS A&HC, 808a, Notes on WVS Health and Hospital Welfare, 1949, 1960, 63/6, Conference of Regional Specialists (Heath and Hospitals), March 20 1951, p7

Canteens



RVS A&HC, Acc.WRVS20100036, Llandough Hospital Out-Patients Canteen
c.1990s

‘The effect of a cup of tea is magical’ ²⁵

WVS had been running canteens, mainly for service men and in emergencies, during the War. From 1943 Birmingham WVS ran a static canteen in a woman’s hospital four days a week feeding patients attending appointments and in one afternoon 200 people were fed by volunteers. ²⁶ In many other hospitals WVS members staffed canteens or recruited domestic workers to fill labour shortages.

²⁵ RVS A&HC, 63/5, WVS Work in Hospitals, 1950.

²⁶ RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1943-CB/BGM, Canteen and Clerical Depts, Dec 1943.

Their role in providing WVS run canteens, however, was not made official until 1949 when Lady Reading and the Minister of Health agreed WVS would expand into running and serving in out-patient canteens.

Canteens were either run solely by WVS, by the hospital only or jointly with hospitals providing the food that WVS requested. Static canteens could be a small space within the hospital or a hut in the hospital grounds. Huts were ordered through the Health and Hospitals Department and paid for through profits made from the canteens. A WVS member acted as canteen leader and was responsible to the Centre Organiser in her area.

In the late 1940s and 50s volunteers had to wear overalls while working in canteens and food had to be served 'daintily'.

Notes on WVS Health and Hospital Work stated that 'there is little to encourage appetite in someone who is not very well in the canteen counter where buns and sticky cakes are the only snacks provided'.²⁷ Early canteens main provisions were sandwiches with the recommended fillings being lentil, pea or bean spread and cream cheese, where possible volunteers also provided hot potatoes as a snack with butter.²⁸

By the 1960s there were three types of canteens in hospitals, static within hospitals, static in the grounds and trolley canteens. Canteens could be seen, by 1971, in out-patient departments, psychiatric hospitals, long-stay patients and isolation hospitals or wards. By the 1970s they were either run solely by WRVS or by the hospital. The range of food provided had also varied to meat pies and sausage rolls as canteens began to include hot counters and the provision of freezers.²⁹

Over the years the running of canteens generally remained the same though with changes to uniforms volunteers did not have to wear WRVS overalls but had a choice of tabards or non WRVS overalls. Those not wearing WRVS uniform had to be provided with armbands to make the organisation's presence clear to patients

²⁷ RVS A&HC, 808a, Notes on WVS Welfare Work in Hospitals, 1949

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ RVS A&HC, 808b, Notes on WRVS Welfare Work in Hospitals, 1974

and staff. Volunteers worked on a rota organised by the canteen leader and their deputy, in the 1980s guidance stated that at least two volunteers had to be on duty when the canteen was open.

Provisions were to be sold at retail prices so that WRVS were not competing with local retailers, profit was not the main objective.³⁰ Canteens were run by WRVS to benefit the health and happiness of the patients and their visitors. Volunteers wanted to provide a place for people to take a break and to bring comfort to those waiting for appointments.

Profits were used to help the hospital; money was not given directly but received as a gift in kind. In 1971 Aberdeen WVS bought, with canteen profits, a “port-a-cabin” bus shelter for Kingseat Hospital.³¹ Gifts were agreed between WRVS and hospitals and had to be for patient welfare. They included equipment, pictures for waiting rooms, new beds, televisions and telephone trolleys. Hospitals were very grateful for gifts, some presented volunteers gift books detailing what profits had bought.

In January 1986 Llandough Hospital gave volunteers a gift book which contained images of all the equipment they had bought as well as cheques they had presented.³² Penarth WRVS continued giving donations in the 1990s providing wheel chairs and monitors to the maternity unit using profits from their two canteens at Llandough.³³ Throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century WRVS volunteers continued to run canteens and use the profits to fund gifts for hospitals. In November 2012 WRVS gave NHS Grampian £500,000 raised from their work in hospital canteens and trolley shops.³⁴

³⁰ RVS A&HC, 808b, Notes on WRVS Welfare Work in Hospitals, 1971, 1974, Welfare Work in Hospitals 1984

³¹ RVS A&HC, WRVS Bulletin Volume 27 1971.

³² RVS A&HC, Timeline – The First 75 Years .

³³ RVS A&HC, Acc.WRVS20100036, Penarth office material, Wales, Narrative Reports, Vale of Glamorgan, 01/04/1992-01/10/1992

³⁴ British Broadcasting Corporation, WRVS giving NHS Grampian £500,000 donation, 30 November 2012 www.bbc.co.uk/news/ukscotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-20553944



Llandough Hospital gift presentation c.1980s

RVS A&HC, Acc.WRVS20100036

Trolley shops & shopping services



ACC:WRVS20110004

Mary Dendy Hospital Shop 1969

Trolley shops and shopping services were a post-war development in the work of WVS volunteers. Over the years they became a familiar and welcome sight in wards across Britain allowing patients to maintain independence and a sense of routine.

Personal shopping services were provided to elderly patients by the Old Peoples Welfare Department from July 1946. Volunteers would be 'bringing in articles from local shops so that the old people may choose their own goods, and chatting to

them'.³⁵ This description from a Headquarters Annual Report sounds very similar to later descriptions of trolley shops however the first use of the phrase appears in 1948. In the Old Peoples Welfare Department Annual Report it was stated that 'Trolley Shops are a very popular innovation'.³⁶ The Bulletin, in April that year, declared that, 'a shopping service has been started for aged and long term patients in County Hospital, Driffield. On two days each week some popular articles are taken around several wards on trolleys'.³⁷ In the following month's issue it was referred to as the 'Trolley Shopping Service' and another one had been started in Reigate.³⁸

By 1949 there were 183 shops on wards usually doing two rounds per week. In hospitals where trolleys were not available volunteers used tea trays and gypsy baskets. A variety of items could be found on a hospital trolley shop in 1950 for example this could include:

- Biscuits
- Tobacco and cigarettes (the centre organiser had to apply for a licence to sell tobacco on the trolley)
- Sweets
- Fruit
- The Ministry of Health also required certain articles to be supplied for free for example soap, toothpaste and razor blades.³⁹

Personalised shopping services remained popular, patients could make requests, this usually took place in hospitals where it was difficult to organise a trolley shop. Some areas also had volunteers who would take long term patients out (with

³⁵ As Civil Defence work diminished towards the end of the war WVS moved more towards old peoples welfare, providing similar services in care homes as in hospitals

³⁶ RVS A&HC, 677, Headquarters Annual Reports 1940 – 1953, Old People's Welfare Report 1948

³⁷ RVS A&HC, WRVS Bulletin Volume 6 No. 100, April 1948

³⁸ RVS A&HC, WRVS Bulletin Volume 6 No. 101, May 1948

³⁹ RVS A&HC, 63/1, Health and Hospitals, 1949-1973

matron's permission) Christmas shopping in the local town.⁴⁰ Most areas provided special trolley shops for patients who could not leave to buy cards and gifts.

In December 1951 a trolley shop was started at WVS Marlborough's local hospital. The Centre Organiser arranged a special Christmas trolley selling homemade gifts for patients to buy as presents for family and friends. The Christmas trolley shop raised £3 9s 0d in profit for the hospital.⁴¹



Marlborough WVS Trolley Shop 1951

WRVS/HQ/NR/R7/1951-WILT/MBO B

For members who ran the trolley shops, it was all about providing a service to make patients feel special, to give them independence and connections with the world outside. Volunteers would go in and visit patients on other days and in one area were asked to collect a patient's belongings from their house as they had no one else to do it for them.⁴² The service continued to be popular and by 1963 there were 687 trolley shops across Britain.⁴³ Trolley shops remained popular with patients

⁴⁰ Ibid.

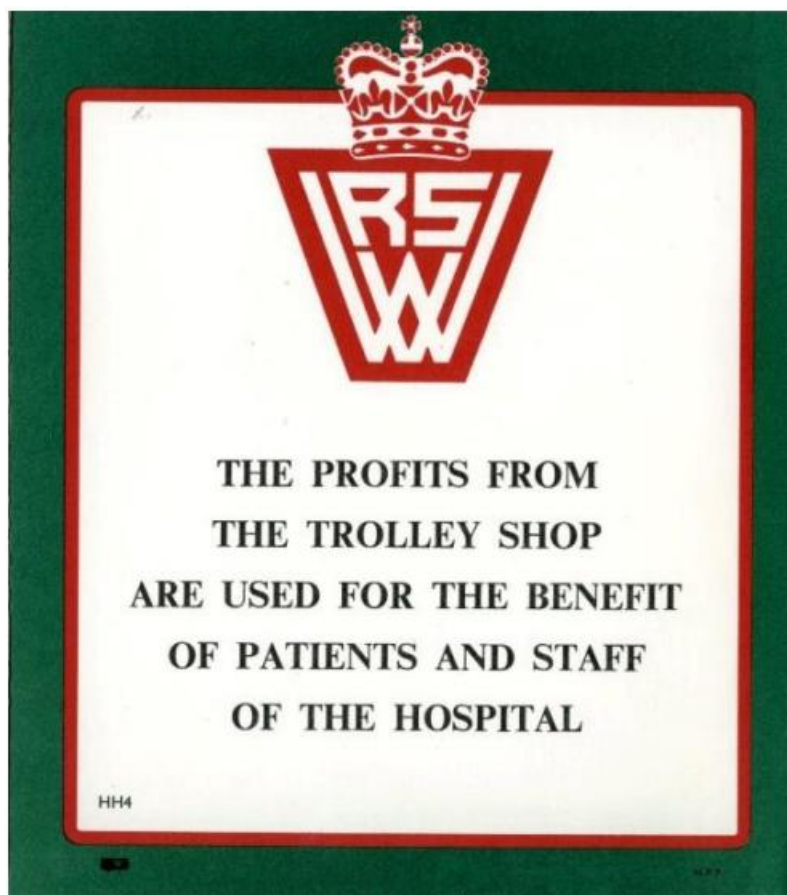
⁴¹ RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/NR/R7/1951-WILT/MBO B, Narrative Reports – Marlborough, Dec

⁴² RVS A&HC, 63/1, op, cit.

⁴³ RVS A&HC, WRVSA&HC/WRVS/PUB/WVS004, Report on 25 Years Work, 1938-1963

through the 1970s, 80s and 90s. They featured, mainly, in wards where there were chronic or elderly patients who appreciated visitors and a friendly face.

In the mid 90's patients said, of trolley shops, 'It's great to have some company and I look forward to buying a bit of chocolate'. ⁴⁴ Today there are still Royal Voluntary Service trolley shops on wards providing refreshments and items such as magazines - cigarettes are no longer available.



Poster from 1974, which was displayed on Trolley Shops visiting wards in hospitals

WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/PUB/HH/PSTR-HH-007

⁴⁴ RVS A&HC, 823, W.V.S. Publications General Information 1938 – 1973, Simply Caring and In Your Hospital Leaflets, 1994

Special campaigns

As part of their work in hospitals, WRVS were asked to help with a number of health campaigns initiated by the welfare state. The role was mainly administrative for example handing out information, organising events or medical visits and staffing clinics which provided immunisations for illnesses such as polio.

During a flu epidemic in the north west in 1951 five hospitals sent out an SOS to WVS for help. Over three or four weeks six volunteers gave their assistance.⁴⁵

One of the long term campaigns was increasing the number of blood donors. The organisation involvement with blood transfusion began in the 1940s. By 1954, 348 of its centres across Britain were engaged with blood transfusion. This included recruiting donors, providing tea and biscuits and organising sessions. The role of WVS in this work increased in 1954 when the Ministry of Health started a nation campaign to increase numbers and with the advancement of modern technology the WVS's work in this area became more significant from the late 1950s to 1970s.⁴⁶

WVS also assisted in organising mass radiography across the country and youth vaccine trials for tuberculosis. Seventeen WVS centres were involved with this work in 1952 compared to eight the year before. In most areas they manned the appointments bureau and promoted the service. Mass radiography was carried out in Britain until the 1970s.⁴⁷

Other activities

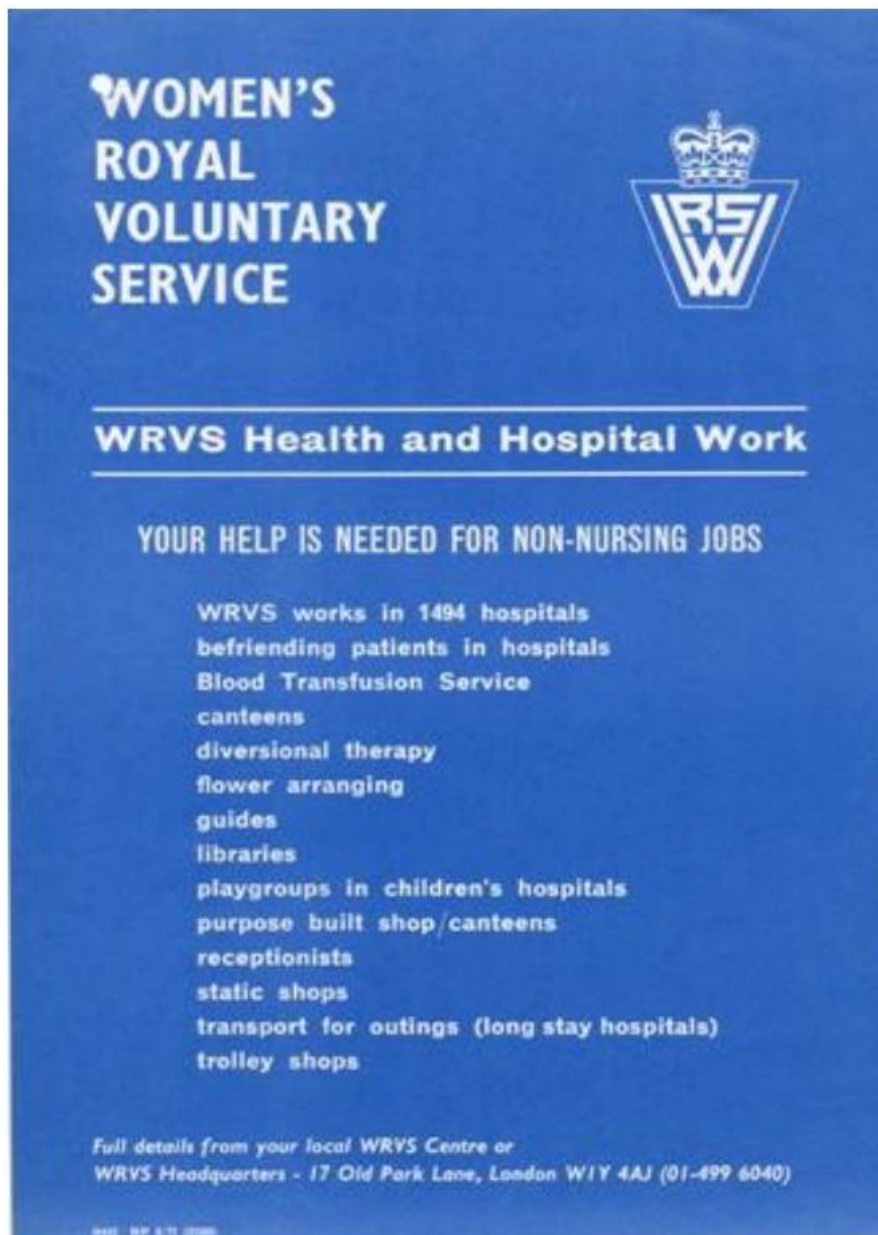
Volunteers were often asked to take on other work within the hospital as and when required, usually by the matron. This work included: running handicraft workshops; writing letters; entertaining; escorting on journeys; Darby and Joan Clubs for long-

⁴⁵ RVS A&HC, WRVSA&HC/WRVS/PUB/WVS004, Report on 25 Years Work 1938-1963

⁴⁶ RVS A&HC, WRVSA&HC/WRVS/PUB/WVS004, Report on 25 Years Work 1938-1963, 808a, Notes on WRVS Welfare Work in Hospitals, 1971

⁴⁷ The technique for mass screening for tuberculosis using a miniature (50 to 100 mm) photograph of the screen of a xray fluoroscopy of the thorax, first developed in 1935. 63/1/1, Health And Hospitals 1949 - 1973

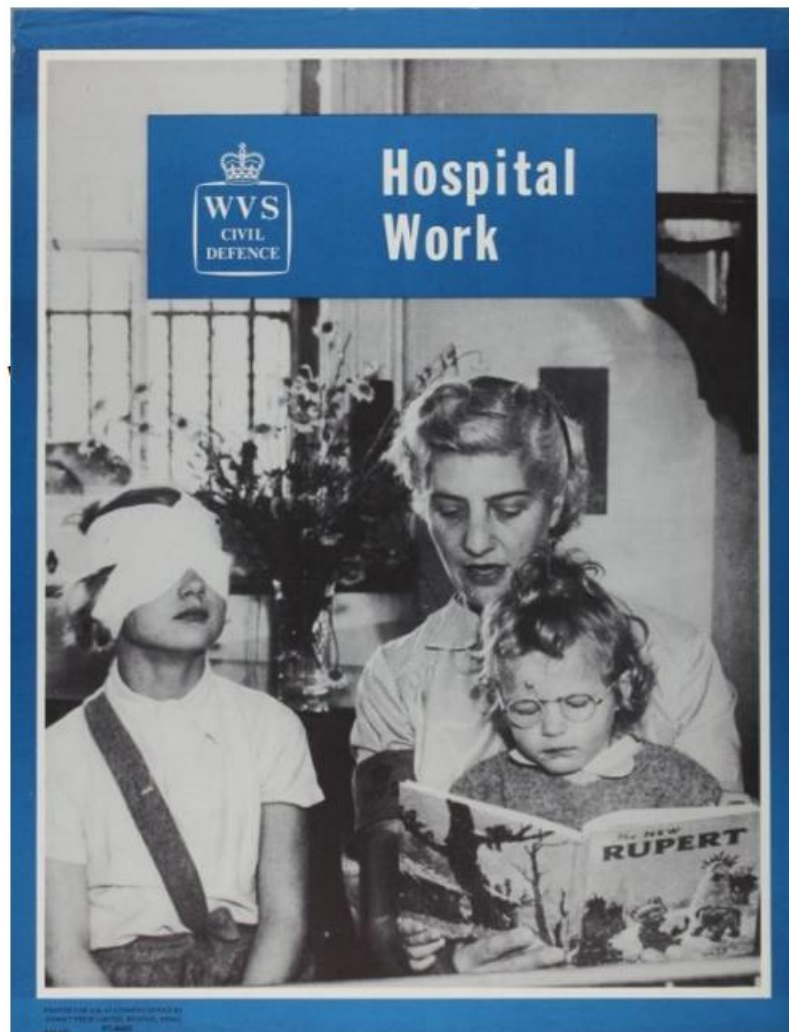
stay patients; telephone trolley services; flower arranging; hair dressing and many more activities to benefit patients.⁴⁸



WRVS Health and Hospital Work poster 1970s
WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/PUB/HH/PSTR-HH-009

⁴⁸ RVS A&HC, WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/PUB/HH/PSTR-HH-009, 808b, WRVS WORK IN HOSPITALS, 1981

Children's wards & hospitals



WVS Volunteer reading to children, Poster 1950s

Volunteers also had many duties in relation to children's welfare. Many of these duties came under the Children's Department for example children's holidays though, work both in and out of hospital involved members of the Health and Hospitals Department.

WVS/WRVS roles included:

- looking after children whose parents were visiting the hospital
- taking children for walks while they were convalescing

- visiting “long term” patients ⁴⁹
- making and mending toys on the wards
- running story hours
- knitting clothes
- Providing/collecting mother’s milk for premature babies or babies with gastro-enteritis. ⁵⁰



Receiving food gifts from overseas in London, 08/07/1953,
WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/P/COM/GFO044

⁴⁹ RVS A&HC, 63/5, Hospitals, General Correspondence, 1944-1950

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Most of these roles remained the same while volunteers were active in children's wards and hospitals. Depending on demand, however, over the years WVS/WRVS took on even more roles to benefit children. Welfare foods were already available from mobile canteens and WVS centres, by the 1950s volunteers had begun to provide welfare foods from out-patient clinics. These foods included orange juice and cod liver oil and were also available from antenatal clinics in the 1960s and beyond.⁵¹

Also in the 1950s volunteers would broadcast records on a gramophone to patients and in the 1960s this included story telling broadcasts. By the late 1970s they had developed into internal radio services, provided by WRVS. The most popular broadcasts always remained request shows with children and parents asking for songs. Entertainment did not just include story time and music, volunteers also ran playrooms.⁵²

Playrooms could be used by children staying in hospital, children visiting the outpatient department and those who had parents visiting cases which would not be appropriate to see; they became the main focus of WRVS work in hospitals in the 1970s. It was claimed that the need for volunteers had increased in hospitals for two main reasons.

1. Children were kept in bed less and it was more difficult for nurses and staff to watch them.
2. Visiting hours had been extended and some children's parents were not always able to visit and those children required regular visitors.⁵³

Most members who ran play groups/rooms in hospitals went on courses to assist them in their work. Toys were provided by the hospital or collections were made in the local areas near the hospital. They also focused on playing with individual children as the Ministry of Health and Social Security asked them to provide befriending schemes for children in the early 1970s. This led to WRVS assisting

⁵¹ 808b, opt. cit., 1974

⁵² RVS A&HC, 808a, Notes on WRVS Welfare Work in Hospitals, 1960, 808b, opt. cit., 1974

⁵³ RVS A&HC, 808b, Notes on WRVS Welfare Work in Hospitals, 1974

parents, of children needing the befriending service, to travel to the hospital to visit them; as a result more parents were able to visit their children by the late 1970s and early 1980s. However the befriending scheme was still very important, it was stated in the leaflet WRVS Work in Hospitals 'but WRVS visits when needed and plays with or reads to the children'.⁵⁴

WRVS even worked to help hospitals provide much needed medical and mental health services for children. In 1988 it was decided that WRVS would give around £80,000 of profits it made in hospitals in Manchester to build a ward at Booth Hall Children's Hospital for victims of child sexual abuse. 'The Booth Hall Jubilee Children's Centre was officially opened by the Princess Royal in July 1989; fittingly on the site of the old WRVS tea bar and shop.'⁵⁵

⁵⁴ RVS A&HC, 808b, WRVS Work in Hospitals, 1977

⁵⁵ RVS A&HC, Timeline – The First 75 Years

Psychiatric hospitals



Front page from Mental Health Week 1968 Leaflet

In 1951 a WVS publication stated that ‘by helping to teach handicrafts, knitting and painting, by taking patients to church and for walks, and by organising games WVS keep patients in touch with the outside world and reassure those who may be considering coming forward for voluntary treatment’. ⁵⁶ Over the years the organisation aimed to improve patient’s lives in psychiatric hospitals and by working in those hospitals to dispel myths and stereotypes surrounding mental illness.

In 1946 members of WVS based at Headquarters in London began investigations into what work they could do in psychiatric hospitals (at the time referred to as Hospitals for the mentally ill and mentally handicapped). The Medical Superintendents were asked what the needs of the hospital were and tours were

⁵⁶ RVS A&HC, 808a, Health and Hospital Work Women’s Voluntary Services, 1951

taken by members to see the conditions they would be working in. Volunteers were requested for roles including: helping with meals; walks; occupational therapy; needle work; organising indoor and outdoor games, acting as escorts; providing entertainment and library services.⁵⁷

In 1948 the Board of Control officially asked WVS to assist with staff shortages in psychiatric hospitals. The Board of Control would notify WVS of any hospitals in need of their help and suitable volunteers would be asked to provide their services.⁵⁸

Over the next ten years members made it their main aim to improve patient welfare and giving them a connection with the outside world. In Staffordshire in 1949, for example, volunteers taught rug making to patients. Some volunteers, from all over Britain, even invited patients into their homes, for tea parties, after taking them on days out or escorting them on visits to other hospitals. Day centres and facilities were available for those who were able to return home after staying in psychiatric hospitals.

All this work came at a time when attitudes were changing to mental health and disability leading to many developments in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵⁹ In 1959 the Mental Health Act was passed it abolished the distinction between psychiatric units and other hospitals while encouraging the development of community care.⁶⁰ This allowed the WVS to establish more occupational centres, providing training especially for handicapped children. The organisation also established purpose built social centres containing canteens and shops for patients and their visitors. The centres were funded by the WVS/WRVS Bank Loan Scheme which were repaid from canteen and shop profits.

The first of these centres was opened at St. Francis Hospital, Hillingdon by Princess Maria Duchess of Kent in November 1961, it cost £11,000 to build. The scheme's

⁵⁷ RVS A&HC, 61/1, WVS/WRVS Help In Mental Hospitals 1946- 1959, Report from Lady Schuster to Lady Reading, Mental Hospitals, 25 Nov 1946

⁵⁸ *ibid*

⁵⁹ 808a, WVS Welfare work in Hospitals, 1963

⁶⁰ *ibid*, Circular CCB H.1/59, 25 November 1959

aim was to ease patients back into life outside the hospital; they could help WVS with their work and spend money as they wished.⁶¹

Another 30 social centres were built over the next decade including Friern Barnet, St. Lukes Middlesbrough and St. Johns Bracebridge Heath.⁶² From 1968 WRVS also became involved with Mental Health Week. By 1971, 28 of the planned purpose built canteens, were completed.⁶³

In the 1970s WRVS also worked with refugees, who mainly came from the Soviet Union, in psychiatric hospitals. Volunteers would befriend patients who didn't have family or friends in the UK and work with British Council to assist patients when they left hospital.⁶⁴ The organisation's presence remained strong in psychiatric hospitals through the 1970s and into 1980s. Their aims remained the same, to provide patients with a link to the outside world; stop isolation and loneliness; build up confidence; prepare patients for leaving and educate the public about mental illness.

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⁶¹ Bentley-Bowman, K. 1977. Green Sleeves: The Story of the WVS/WRVS. Seeley, Service & Co. London

⁶² RVS A&HC, 60/3, Region 3 Mental Hospitals, Inc. St Johns Hospital, Lincoln, 1970-1972, 61/5, Mental Hospitals Correspondence With London Region Including Friern Hospital, 1960 - 1971

⁶³ RVS A&HC, 61/5, *ibid.*

⁶⁴ RVS A&HC, 808b, Notes on WRVS Health and Hospital Work, 1974, 1984

⁶⁵ RVS A&HC, 808b, Notes on WRVS Health and Hospital Work, 1984

WORK in HOSPITALS

The importance of voluntary welfare work in hospitals is recognised officially. WRVS does non-medical work in over 1,000 hospitals today but there is an ever increasing need to expand its services. Even a few hours a week can help.

Shops

Anyone who has spent any length of time in hospital knows what a help it is to be able to buy for oneself the little things one needs such as stamps, writing paper, soap, talcum powder. WRVS brings these amenities to the bedside. A laden WRVS trolley shop will visit the wards, and there is time for a chat and WRVS members who do the buying also take special orders from bed patients. Many hospitals have room for a permanent WRVS shop which is used by patients, staff and visitors.

Canteens

WRVS canteens are set up in out-patients departments and are welcomed by patients who may have come long distances, or who have to wait some time to see a specialist. In a number of hospitals WRVS provides refreshments for visitors.

The Mentally Ill and Mentally Handicapped in Hospital

The WRVS work in psychiatric hospitals and in hospitals for the mentally handicapped is similar to that done in general hospitals with trolley shops, canteens and diversional therapy. There are also social evenings, clubs for long-stay patients, entertainments, visits to the sea or the local town. Members of WRVS sometimes arrange tea parties in their own homes. The work is absorbing as members are able to help the patients to return to normality by their friendly interest and by

giving them a contact with the outside world. Attractive purpose-built shop/canteens, where men and women patients can meet together and see their visitors, have been built by WRVS in hospitals and are proving of real therapeutic value.

Gifts to Hospitals

Goods are sold at retail prices so as not to undercut local traders, and profits are accrued by WRVS from shops, trolley shops and canteens. These profits are given back to the hospital in the form of gifts for the patients and staff. WRVS enjoys being able to provide such things as television sets, new curtains and day rooms. A popular type of gift is a tele-trolley which enables patients to telephone from their bedsides.

Work in Children's Wards or Hospitals

Most children in hospital are now more frequently visited by their parents, but WRVS visits when needed and plays with or reads to the children, especially those who have had eye operations or severe burns. WRVS is ready to find members to befriend on a long term basis children who are no longer in touch with their parents. Informal play groups are increasingly run in ante-natal clinics, for out-patients, and for the children of patients' visitors. In several hospitals WRVS runs an internal radio service to broadcast record requests from children and their parents.

Escorts

WRVS escorts help in the out-patients departments of a number of hospitals. Patients are welcomed, escorted to the different departments and in general given guidance and reassurance. In some large and scattered hospitals WRVS guides assist in the reception of new patients, take them to the ward and, if asked by the Ward Sister, help them to unpack and settle in. These services are valued as they relieve the nervous strain of the patients.

Pages from WRVS WORK IN HOSPITALS, 1981

RVS A&HC 808b

The Hospital Car service



Hospital Car Service Poster used during the 1946 awareness campaign.

In July 1942 the Ministry for Homeland Security set up the Volunteer Car Pool (VCP) to address the problems of petrol shortages. Private car owners were encouraged to enrol in the service agreeing to make their car available in an emergency. WVS was asked to be involved in the running of the scheme; by 1944 they were overseeing 570 VCP schemes across Britain. ⁶⁶A lot of this work involved transporting people to hospital.

⁶⁶ RVS A&HC, Report of Ten Years Work for the Nation 1938-1948

In 1943 in Alton Rural, Hampshire, the VCP helped 'an elderly lady who had to be taken to the London for treatment. Her Husband went with her, and on their return, he came into the office, and asked us to accept a pound note as a token of gratitude, to do with as we pleased. It was put in to our Prisoners of War Fund.' ⁶⁷

The VCP ended around the same time as hostilities in Europe in 1945. The BRCS, however, could see there was still a need for transporting people to Hospital. The service would fill in the gaps in transport needs until the introduction of the NHS, which was expected to cover hospital transport. ⁶⁸ Lady Reading also saw a need for the VCP to be replaced with a similar service as 41.5% of VCP work had been for hospitals. Thus in 1945 WVS, St. John's Ambulance and BRCS met to organise a service for those sitting patients who could not afford an ambulance or hire car to hospital. It was named the Hospital Car Service (HCS), which began in Oxfordshire on 1st August 1945. ⁶⁹ It initially started on a six month trial with a three month review in between so that it could be rolled out across Britain. A Transport Officer was appointed in each area; they managed the scheme for all three organisations.

From early 1946 WVS ran a publicity campaign for the scheme sending out posters by David Langdon, having BBC Campaigns and a trailer in local cinemas. The aim was to recruit and make people aware of the scheme as it was estimated that 10,000 cars would be needed. Between July 1945 and July 1946 it was estimated that 409, 987 miles had been covered in England & Wales. ⁷⁰

It was originally thought that the HCS would only be needed until the NHS came into force in 1948 however there was still a need for volunteer drivers. Under the NHS Act 1946 Local Authorities, or in Scotland the Common Service Agency, were obliged to provide transportation to hospital and this need could only be met by using volunteers. It was also thought that the HCS was beneficial to the patients wellbeing thus it was kept running under section 27 of the NHS Act. ⁷¹ It was not a

⁶⁷ RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/NR/R6/1943-HAMP/ALT RD, Alton Rural Hampshire, November 1943.

⁶⁸ RVS A&HC, WA36, Hospital Car Service, Letter 20 April 1945

⁶⁹ RVS A&HC, *ibid*, Letter 4 June 1945, HCS Oxfordshire Report for Three Months, October 1945

⁷⁰ RVS A&HC, *ibid*, Hospital Car service Summary for England and Wales, July 1946

⁷¹ RVS A&HC, *ibid*, Hospital Car Service, c.July 1946

service just for the elderly; in Torquay in 1949 The Torbay Hospital Ante-Natal Clinic was served by a Hospital Car which met patients at the bus stop and drove them up the hill to the hospital. Patients were 'one and all delighted with this new scheme and are most grateful, so the work is well worth doing'.⁷² The service was still required in the 1950s due to rising costs to the ambulance service, although, work was reduced with the introduction of radio controlled cars. However, in 1955 Bristol WVS still averaged around 50 patients a year.

The escort service also had to be used to relieve the pressure of having to find transport for so many people on the HCS in 1950s. Volunteers were asked to push patients living close to hospitals in bath chairs and assist those travelling on buses. In 1964 a total of 6,049,826 miles were covered by volunteers across England and Wales, 799,550 miles in Scotland. The Ministry of Health also wanted the service to continue because of the rising numbers of people reaching retirement age.⁷³ By the mid to late 1960s HCS drivers took over two million people to hospitals per year, proving that the service was still a very valuable one. By 1963 there were 54 counties out of 62 providing a Hospital Car Service and 22 County Boroughs.⁷⁴

Although popular and useful it did not run in some areas for a variety of reasons for example in Winston, Leicestershire in 1962 the Transport Officer did make enquiries into starting a service but was told by the Ambulance Officer that the area could be 'adequately' covered by their ambulance service.⁷⁵

Many other transport schemes also started as a result of the HCS including Spare-a-Mile (1960s) providing lifts for a variety of activities including shopping trips. The mid 1970s saw the running of HCS taken over by the Hospital Authorities but, in some cases such as Scotland, WRVS continued to assist with the administration and recruitment of this service. In other areas volunteers still maintained its work for the elderly and housebound through the Social Transport Scheme (established 1970 known as Country Cars in Wales) to clinics, surgeries, dentists and opticians.

⁷² RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/NR/R7/1949-DEVN/TQY B, WVS Hospital Driving, June 1949.

⁷³ RVS A&HC, WA36, opt. cit., 7R3 WVS HCS England and Wales – 1964, WVS HCS Scotland - 1964

⁷⁴ RVS A&HC, WA36, ibid, Hospital Car Service Figures, 26 February 1964

⁷⁵ RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/NR/R5/1962-LEIC/WSN UD

2,010,250 miles were covered in Scotland and six counties in England, WRVS Jersey also started a HCS in this year, though by 1984 WRVS had moved away from HCS and the work was absorbed into the Social Transport Scheme.

In 1995 the scheme was renamed the Community Transport Service.⁷⁶ Over 60,000 lifts were given as part of WRVS services in 2009, transporting elderly people to places such as hospital and the doctors. In that year the organisation also ran the Give Us a Lift Campaign to recruit more volunteer drivers and to provide more journeys for older people.⁷⁷ Today hospitals run HCSs using their own volunteers to transport sitting cases to hospital. Though, Royal Voluntary Service still provides transport for older people to hospital and doctor appointments through its community services and transport schemes.



A car window card from 1976 used to show when volunteer drivers were on service

⁷⁶ RVS A&HC, 682, Headquarters Annual Reports, 1978-1986

⁷⁷ RVS A&HC, Time Line the First 75 Years ..., Give Us a Lift Campaign 2009, opt. cit., 2013.

Conclusions

From late 1938 and early 1939 WVS was helping to provide services in hospitals which could only be provided with the help of volunteers. The WRVS's work in hospitals reflected the changes to the NHS's role in society and local communities. This was the result of the modifications in NHS policy to not just focus on the physical but also the mental wellbeing and aftercare of patients with the introduction of a ten year plan in 1963 and the 1973 National Health Act.

The organisation did not just react to changes imposed by government it also started services which affected the way hospitals worked. The involvement of the organisation depended on the needs of the hospital and its patients.

During the war the WVS's main focus was to help with staff shortages and supporting the war effort. In hospitals this was done through, feeding service men, blood transfusion scheme, recruiting auxiliary nurses, VCP domestic work such as cleaning wards, running hospital libraries and raising funds. Although they were not expected to many of these roles continued in to the post-war era and were developed further by WVS members. This was a result of the NHS's reliance on voluntary work to assist in running services in hospitals which would not otherwise be provided.

WVS also started new services which helped patients' welfare physically and mentally. Canteens, trolley shops and shopping services were established from 1946-1948 onwards. They did not just provide food and necessities but friendship, independence and something for patients to look forward to during their stay. While during the war fundraising for hospitals had not been nationwide these new services made profits that were spent on gifts for the hospital which included: televisions, curtains, beds and medical equipment. Profits also helped to provide toys as part of the services WVS provided on children's wards including, playrooms, story hours and befriending schemes.

From their successful involvement in recruiting for the Blood Transfusion Scheme during the War WVS were also tasked with other Health Campaigns for hospitals. Mass radiography, TB, Diphtheria, Polio and Influenza vaccinations were rolled out

in the 1960s and 1970s WVS helped to prepare clinics and raise awareness of when immunisations or mass radiography was taking place. Members also helped to raise awareness of mental health issues through their post-war work in psychiatric hospitals and by helping patients with the transition back into the local community. This started in the hospital with the building of social centres in hospital grounds and the running of occupational therapy groups in community centres. Other services provided in psychiatric hospitals were similar to those in the county hospitals including escort work and transport to outpatient appointments through the HCS.

The HCS was developed, By WVS BRCS and St. John's Ambulance, to replace the VCP in June and July 1945 to transport sitting cases to hospital and home again. Although it was only meant to run until July 1948 WVS continued to assist with the scheme until it was taken over by Local Health Authorities in the late 1970s. WRVS volunteers for this service were absorbed into Social Transport Scheme (1984) renamed the Community Transport Scheme in 1995.



Loading casualty into wartime transport Ambulances, 1941
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