

# *the* G1ST

News from Guy's and St Thomas' Issue 47 | 2025



## *Five decades of service*

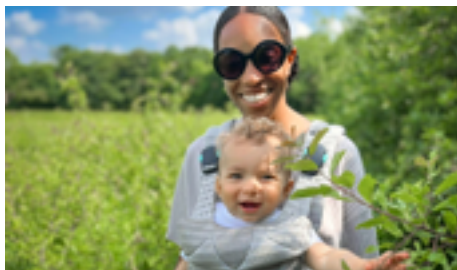
Celebrating the career of Chief Executive, Ian Abbs



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## Welcome

As I prepare to stand down as Chief Executive of Guy's and St Thomas', I feel incredibly proud of everything our organisation has achieved in recent years.

In particular, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of our exceptional staff, whose hard work and commitment allow us to keep delivering excellent care to our patients.

For this edition of the GiST, I invited a few of these colleagues to join me on the front cover in a celebration of the many different professions who are part of our Guy's and St Thomas' family.

In the picture we have a hospital porter, a nurse, a play specialist, an anaesthetist and a physiotherapist – and this is just a tiny snapshot of the expertise and dedication that makes our Trust so special. You can read some of my other reflections from almost 50 years at the Trust on pages 12-15.

In this issue, we also share the exciting results of a clinical trial that has transformed the lives of adults with severe peanut allergy, allowing them to eat small amounts without the risk of a life-threatening reaction. Find out more on page 7.

Guy's and St Thomas' also recently trialled a new AI-assisted pregnancy scan, which can speed up the standard 20-week screening, helping to improve patient care. Read about the study on pages 8 and 9.

Did you know that during World War II, Guy's and St Thomas' medical students provided lifesaving care to the survivors of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp? You can read more about these war heroes on page 21.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the GiST.

*Ian Abbs*

Professor Ian Abbs, Chief Executive Officer (He/Him)  
Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust

## Meet the team

Words and photos by Catherine Beckett, Alana Cullen, Clare Elliott, Ciorsdan Glass, Azmina Gulamhusein, Maxine Hoeksma, Grania Hyde-Smith, Jacob Lipman, Christie Norris, Eloise Parfitt, Joe Sparks, Lesley Walker and Caroline Watson.

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Front cover: Clockwise from top left: physiotherapist Robyn Ostrom; CEO Professor Ian Abbs; assistant play specialist Dean Josephs; ward sister Vanessa Sapp; consultant anaesthetist Dr Madhusudan Puchakayala; hospital porter Chris Craig.

## TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

If you have any comments about the magazine or suggestions for future articles, please contact

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# Funding approved for new surgical centre at Guy's Hospital

Plans are underway for a new surgical centre at Guy's Hospital, following funding approval given by the Government.

The centre will include 6 modern operating theatres in a multi-storey building located next to Guy's Hospital. It will be dedicated to carrying out non-emergency operations, otherwise known as elective (planned) surgery.

Planned orthopaedic surgery will transfer from Guy's main theatres to the new centre. This will free up vital additional capacity to support other surgical services across the Trust, including for cancer patients.

The new surgical centre will also help reduce waiting times for patients at a time of rising demand for complex and specialist planned surgery.

Sarah Clarke, Chief Executive of Cancer and Surgery at Guy's and St Thomas' said: "There is an urgent need to update and expand our operating



A design of the future surgical hub at Guy's Hospital

theatres, to increase capacity.

"We are delighted that we now have approval to develop this much-needed centre, which will allow us to treat more patients, more quickly in a modern facility."

Work to prepare the site has already begun and building work is scheduled to start in June 2026. We hope to welcome our first patients in spring 2029.

## Porter of the Year winner

Edward Thawe, a porter at Royal Brompton Hospital, was recently named 2025 Porter of the Year at a national awards ceremony.

Edward started working as a porter in 2006. He was nominated by his team for the enthusiasm and dedication he has brought to helping patients and staff at the Royal Brompton over the last 20 years.

Susan Bunce, senior nurse for private patients and cardiology, said: "Edward has an inherent ability to connect with people and has a genuine respect for their experiences. He goes the extra mile and gives 100% in all that he does."

His nomination also recognised his resilience in the face of personal tragedy and how he balanced his work commitments alongside raising his two sons alone, after the death of his wife in November 2022.

Edward said: "Winning the award was really amazing and it reminded me of some



Edward Thawe, with his Porter of the Year award

advice a patient once shared – in every opportunity you find in life, take it and you will learn something. If it doesn't work out, it doesn't matter, you will still learn."

## IN THE NEWS

A round-up of media coverage featuring Guy's and St Thomas'.

### BBC News

BBC News interviewed clinical research fellow, Dr Blair Merrick, on a new research study exploring how faecal microbiota transplants (otherwise known as 'poo pills') can be used to treat infections. Led by Guy's and St Thomas' and King's College London, the trial showed that pills containing freeze-dried faeces could be effective in treating certain types of 'superbugs' that are resistant to antibiotics.

### Southwark News

Southwark News reported on a new Guy's Dental Hospital scheme which has helped cut patient waiting times for dental care from 6 months to 2 weeks. Under this pilot, local dentists can use virtual clinics to get advice and guidance about their patients directly from a hospital consultant. This reduces the need for patients to attend an in-hospital appointment. This pilot project was funded by Guy's & St Thomas' Charity.



### ITV News

The garden of the Amputee Rehabilitation Unit in Lambeth was featured on ITV News. The report explored how the garden is used to support patients' emotional and physical recovery after undergoing an amputation. Head gardener, Joe Scoble, was filmed alongside patients, David and Peter. The patients explained how the garden had helped them regain their independence and self-confidence.





Denise Otar and supporters on their fundraising walk for Guy's and St Thomas'

## Fundraising for our stroke ward

In 2023, Denise Otar suffered a stroke while she was asleep in bed. After being rushed to accident and emergency, she was moved to the stroke rehabilitation unit at St Thomas' where she received treatment to help her recover from this life-changing event.

She recently decided to organise a sponsored walk from Kings' College Hospital to St Thomas' Hospital to fundraise for the Hope-Gordon Foundation and the rehabilitation ward that provided her care. Her generous donation has been used to purchase equipment, such as strengthening balls and walking sticks, that can support the recovery of other patients.

Denise said: "My consultants were outstanding, as were my physiotherapists. Everyone who has a stroke should experience this kind of care. I also hope this walk will raise awareness of strokes and how they can present in different ways."

She plans to hold this walk as a yearly event to continue fundraising for this important cause. She is also looking to create a monthly support group, providing stroke survivors with a space to share experiences and tips on recovery with each other.



Evelina London Children's Hospital welcomed acclaimed British author and poet, Michael Rosen, to its intensive care unit to celebrate the launch of a newly-donated library. Michael met patients, families and staff on the ward and did a special reading of his famous book *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*.

## Your voice

We love to hear from our patients, staff and supporters so join the conversation by following us on Facebook, X (previously known as Twitter), LinkedIn and Instagram.

**@DeanSouthwark (from X)**

Thank you to the staff of St Thomas' A and E for all your help today and tonight.

**@AntonyTiernan (from X)**

A huge thank you to the team at @GSTTnhs for hosting another blood donor session at St Thomas' Hospital. We welcomed over 80 donors whose generous donations could help save up to 240 lives.

**@Mollie (from Facebook)**

HUGE thank you to all the amazing staff at Evelina London Children's Hospital - the incredible nurses in the cardiology ward, Critical Care Unit and Intensive Care Unit, you are phenomenal.



**@DrSAfzal (from X)**

Huge thanks to the lovely humans at @GSTTnhs for taking care of my father the last few days. You are amazing and my family and I are hugely grateful for all the amazing care. Side note – what a wonderful view as you leave!

## Supporting patients and staff through King's Health Partners

King's Health Partners brings together Guy's and St Thomas', King's College Hospital, South London and Maudsley, and King's College London. Working together, we can speed up the discovery of new treatments and improve care for patients.

It also supports our students and staff, including a free online learning hub, funding for research, and an honorary passport that enables cross-site working.

One project that has been funded is the Clinical Diagnostic Development Unit (CDDU) at Guy's Hospital, which tests patients' clinical samples to support research into certain diseases.

Dr Rocio Martinez-Nunez, who leads the unit, said: "The partnership provides



The CDDU team

an enormous and rich resource of people and knowledge that can do really cool stuff together. We wouldn't exist without it, and we now collaborate within it."

The partnership also encourages patients to get involved by providing feedback on their care. This can help services be better designed to meet the needs of local communities.

King's Health Partners has recently launched a new strategy outlining how it will continue to improve healthcare services for patients in south east London and beyond. To find out more, visit: [www.kingshealthpartners.org](http://www.kingshealthpartners.org).

## New easy read hospital passport

Guy's and St Thomas' has created a new hospital passport in easy read format. The aim is to help people with learning disabilities to communicate their needs to hospital staff.

We have designed the passport in response to the significant health inequalities faced by people with learning disabilities. Research shows that these patients are 4 times more likely to die from treatable medical causes.



Our new hospital passport in easy read format

The new passport uses simple words and pictures and carers or our learning disability team can help patients to put information about their needs into the document. This can reduce misunderstanding and improve communication when a patient comes to hospital.

Yetunde Rosiji, deputy clinical nurse specialist for learning disability services, said: "The passport is a great practical tool. It helps hospital staff to understand the needs of people with learning disabilities and give them the best possible care."

For further information, visit: [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/easy-read](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/easy-read)

## Robotic lung surgery success



The Royal Brompton surgical team, with the new Da Vinci Xi surgical system

Earlier this year, Royal Brompton Hospital successfully completed its first robotic-assisted lung surgery using an innovative robot, known as the da Vinci Xi surgical system.

During this type of operation, a surgeon controls a robotic arm to make tiny incisions in a patient. This enables surgeons to perform complex procedures with greater precision and accuracy, resulting in less post-operative pain, faster recovery times, and shorter hospital stays.

It is anticipated that using this robotic system could also make surgeries more efficient, enabling the Royal Brompton surgical team to increase the number of patients treated each year.

Mr Simon Jordan, consultant thoracic surgeon, said: "This is a transformative moment for our thoracic surgery programme at Royal Brompton Hospital. We hope to improve patient outcomes and increase the number of patients we can treat."



## Maxine Hoeksma

learns about a community liver service that is transforming patient care.

# Bringing scans closer to home



The new service has been supported by clinical nurse specialist, Jonathan Presky, and consultant liver specialist, Terry Wong

Long waits for diagnostic tests can be nerve-racking for patients. However, a new service from Guy's and St Thomas' is aiming to change that by providing Lambeth residents with "life-changing" scans closer to home.

Under the pilot scheme, eligible patients can receive their liver scans at a local GP practice, rather than having to attend a hospital appointment. This can help patients receive their scans faster, while also reducing pressure on hospital services.

Stephanie Andrews, a 53-year-old procurement manager, is one of hundreds of local people using this new community service.

Stephanie had previously been having ultrasounds every 6 months to monitor a small growth, known as a polyp, on her gallbladder. In 2023, an MRI detected additional lesions on her liver and pancreas, and she found that she was suddenly losing weight.

After contacting her doctors, Stephanie was offered a Fibroscan. This

is a special ultrasound that checks whether there is any damage or scarring to the liver. If left untreated, this type of damage can lead to liver failure, which is a life-threatening condition.

Stephanie said: "I'm quite small anyway, so any kind of weight loss shows quite quickly. I'd lost about half a stone so they wanted to see if there was anything untoward going on."

Through the new service, Stephanie was able to have a quick and convenient Fibroscan at the Akerman Medical

Practice near Oval in Lambeth.

She said: "I was surprised because I received a text and was able to book an appointment for the Fibroscan the following day. The nurse, Jonathan, did the scan and gave me lots of feedback straight away, without having to wait for a letter or telephone call.

"I left there feeling a lot better mentally as some of my questions had been answered. And you get peace of mind, which is really helpful when you

have any health concerns."

Following a Fibroscan, patients' results are analysed by a team of liver specialists from Guy's and St Thomas' and a Lambeth GP. Around 200 patients have been seen by the service since it began.

Jonathan Presky, a clinical nurse specialist at Guy's and St Thomas' who carries out the scans, said: "The aim is to try to identify problems early before they become more serious. Patients can also be seen very quickly."

Terry Wong, the consultant liver specialist who leads the project, said: "For many patients being able to access this service in a GP practice is much more convenient.

"The service means that we can work in partnership with GP colleagues to make a real difference, as we detect, treat and improve care for local people with liver disease."

Following the success of this initial 12-month pilot, the Trust now hopes to expand the service to cover the whole of Lambeth.

The Fibroscan and staff who support the service have been funded by Guy's & St Thomas' Charity.

**"The service means that we can work in partnership with GP colleagues to make a real difference."**

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## Lesley Walker

talks to patients who took part in a new clinical trial to reduce peanut allergies in adults.

# Allergy trial success



Chris Brookes-Smith now eats 4 peanuts a day

Chris Brookes-Smith had a lifelong serious peanut allergy which restricted what he ate, where he ate and how he could travel. But after taking part in the first study of its kind in adults, Chris now eats 4 peanuts a day with his breakfast and no longer worries about it potentially killing him.

Diagnosed as a baby with peanut allergy, Chris experienced many bad reactions from peanuts, with the worst being when he ate curry at a local takeaway which he didn't know had peanuts in it. It gave him an immediate and serious reaction which needed hospital treatment.

Chris, a 28-year-old cybersecurity specialist from Northamptonshire, said: "Within seconds, there were spots on my lips. Within minutes, I was vomiting. I could feel my throat closing up, hives forming in my armpits then over my whole body. I thought I was going to die."

Chris is among a group of people with severe peanut allergies who took part in the Grown Up Adult Peanut Immunotherapy trial. This was joint research between Guy's and St Thomas' and King's College London, funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research.

Adult patients who took part in the trial

were given small daily doses of peanut protein in hospital under close supervision. This type of treatment, known as immunotherapy, aims to gradually reduce an individual's sensitivity to peanuts so they no longer become life threatening.

Chris started with a very small amount of peanut flour and gradually advanced until he was eating whole nuts by the end. He now eats them every day to maintain his immunity.

Richard Lassiter, an executive coach from Kent, also took part in the trial after having a severe reaction to peanuts while on holiday in a remote part of Chile. Richard was hospitalised overnight and recovered after treatment.

He said: "It was a huge shock. It happened so far away, with potentially catastrophic consequences. When I got home, I spoke to my GP who told me about a trial at Guy's Hospital."

Two-thirds of the 21 people who took part in the preliminary research could eat the equivalent of 5 peanuts by the end of the trial. Although this could be

transformational for people with serious peanut allergies, these findings need to be confirmed in larger trials.

The trial was led by Professor Stephen Till, consultant allergist at Guy's and St Thomas', and Hannah Hunter, specialist allergy dietitian.

Hannah said: "Living with peanut allergy is a huge burden due to the need for constant vigilance and the risk of accidental exposures. Everyday situations such as eating in restaurants and social events are

anxiety provoking and our patients tell us that the condition also affects travel choices and career options.

"We found that quality of life significantly improved after oral immunotherapy and fear of food also decreased. Many participants who completed the trial told us that the treatment had been life-changing and they were no longer living in fear."

Chris said: "Before, a tiny mistake could have a life-threatening impact, but now I don't have the fear that I might collapse and die from eating a takeaway."

**"Now I don't have the fear that I might collapse and die from eating a takeaway."**

## Caroline Watson

learns about new technology enhancing pregnancy scans for parents and babies.

# Improving care before birth



The AI-assisted pregnancy scan is significantly faster, allowing sonographers more time for patient care

Pregnancy scans can be a stressful and uncertain time for parents, when they find out whether their baby is likely to have any health conditions at birth.

A new study has now shown that artificial intelligence (AI) can help improve the experience of these routine screenings for both parents and sonographers.

The new technology helps sonographers to identify any abnormalities almost twice as quickly as a regular scan, which frees up time for them to focus on other important aspects of the screening. This could include talking with parents to clearly explain any findings and offer reassurance, as well as spending more time looking at any areas of concern.

The recent trial, led by Guy's and St Thomas' and King's College London and funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research, has been the first of its kind to use AI for the 20-week scan on real patients.

Results from the trial, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine AI*,

found that AI-assisted pregnancy scans were 40 per cent shorter than standard ones, without compromising on the accuracy or reliability.

Dr Thomas Day, who was the lead author of the study and is a consultant paediatric and fetal cardiologist at Evelina London Children's Hospital, said:

"Understandably, this 20-week scan can be a nerve-racking time for parents, as they're finding out the health of their unborn child.

"Our research has shown that AI-assisted scans are accurate, reliable and more efficient. We hope that using AI in these scans will free up precious time for sonographers to focus on patient care, making the experience more comfortable and reassuring for parents."

The 20-week scan is an opportunity for sonographers to diagnose 11 different conditions in a baby, including heart

defects and spina bifida. Any early detection of abnormalities allows clinical teams to then plan for urgent treatments or procedures the baby might need immediately after birth.

The trial included 78 pregnant participants and 58 different sonographers. Each expectant parent received the 20-week scan twice, once using the AI-assisted scanner and once without the use of AI.

One of the participants in the trial at St Thomas' Hospital was

Ashleigh Louison, a 36-year-old senior operations manager from north-west London. During Ashleigh's pregnancy, her son Lennox was diagnosed with heart disease. This early diagnosis allowed doctors at St Thomas' and Evelina London to plan immediate medical care for Lennox when he was born, including lifesaving surgery within two weeks of his birth.

**"We hope that using AI in these scans will free up precious time to focus on patient care."**





Ashleigh Louison, who was a participant in the AI trial, and her son Lennox

Ashleigh said: “Receiving an early diagnosis for Lennox was really important, as it meant we could properly plan the road ahead.”

“We immediately knew he would likely need open heart surgery and that we would be staying in hospital for a few weeks after his birth. This gave us the chance to physically and mentally prepare for what was coming.”

The study showed that the AI-assisted scans – which automatically took several thousand snapshots of each fetal measurement compared to three taken by a human sonographer – were more reliable compared to manual measurements.

Clinicians involved in the trial believe this may improve the accuracy of assessing fetal growth and health, helping medical professionals make decisions earlier that could improve health outcomes for the baby.

**“Receiving an early diagnosis for Lennox was really important, as it meant we could plan the road ahead.”**

The AI-powered technology also alters the way in which the scan is performed. Sonographers no longer need to pause, save images, or measure during the scan, resulting in fewer interruptions and making the process smoother.

Reflecting on her involvement in the AI study, Ashleigh added: “I am so glad to have participated in the trial as I want to support anything that can help save children’s lives through faster and earlier diagnoses of conditions.”

“I know that some conditions can be hard to spot, and so I’m excited at the prospect of using new technology that can help address this. If my participation ends up helping even just one family, then I’m all for it.”

The AI-assisted scanning technology is now being rolled out more widely through a spin-out company called



Ashleigh and her baby son Lennox, two days after Lennox received lifesaving heart surgery at Evelina London

‘Fraiya’, involving Guy’s and St Thomas’, King’s College London and King’s College Hospital. The company’s goal is to create AI-powered tools for pregnancy ultrasound that improve medical diagnoses, help healthcare professionals, and enhance care for patients.

Professor Reza Razavi, senior author of the study and a paediatric cardiologist at Guy’s and St Thomas’, said: “It is vital that congenital problems in unborn babies are picked up in pregnancy to help give them the best possible outcomes after birth.”

“Our study shows that combining cutting-edge AI with human expertise could make these scans much quicker and easier to do, while maintaining the accuracy and reliability of the scans.”

“This is a great way to improve staff experience while also improving the care of parents and babies. AI can support sonographers to work at the top of their game so every hospital across the country can deliver really great care.”

**Catherine Beckett**  
celebrates 30 years  
of Harefield Hospital's  
artificial heart  
programme.

# Our history of heart innovation



Harefield Hospital's artificial heart team with LVADs throughout the years

This year, Harefield Hospital marks 30 years since the beginning of its artificial heart programme.

The programme began in 1995 under the leadership of renowned surgeon, Professor Sir Magdi Yacoub. Three decades later, more than 550 artificial heart pumps, known as left ventricular assist devices (LVADs), have been implanted at Harefield.

Professor Yacoub recalls: "Harefield was at the forefront of transplantation but, at the time, too many patients were deteriorating before a suitable donor heart was available.

"Thanks to the innovative spirit of our clinical specialists and companies willing to invest, we pushed LVAD research and technology forward to secure better outcomes for our patients."

Dr Chris Bowles, a specialist in mechanical circulatory support and artificial hearts at Harefield Hospital, has been part of the programme since its inception. He believes Professor Yacoub was responsible for much of the success of Harefield's programme, describing him

as a "pioneer of the heart transplant programme" and someone who "inspired a bench-to-bedside philosophy, encouraging innovation among the team."

Reflecting on the types of artificial heart devices used at Harefield, Dr Bowles said: "In the late 80s and early 90s, circulatory support devices could only sustain the heart for a very short period of time. They were used to help patients recover from open heart surgery, or as a brief bridge to heart transplantation.

"They were bulky too. Early devices could cause abdominal issues because they took up so much space inside the body."

Remembering the day in 1995 when the team first implanted the next-generation LVAD, Dr Bowles said: "The technology evolved beyond recognition. The improvement in technology meant patients could live far longer after suffering heart failure.

"It was a lifeline for people on the donor heart waiting list. And now a heart can be supported with an LVAD for 5 to 10 years, some even longer. These days, it's not only a life-sustaining bridge to transplant, in some patients an LVAD can

help the heart to rest and recover enough that a transplant is no longer needed."

Kirsten Broadley was 37 when she suffered acute heart failure from viral myocarditis, which is when an infection

causes the heart to inflame. Her symptoms were so severe she needed temporary life support until her Harefield clinical team implanted an LVAD to support her heart.

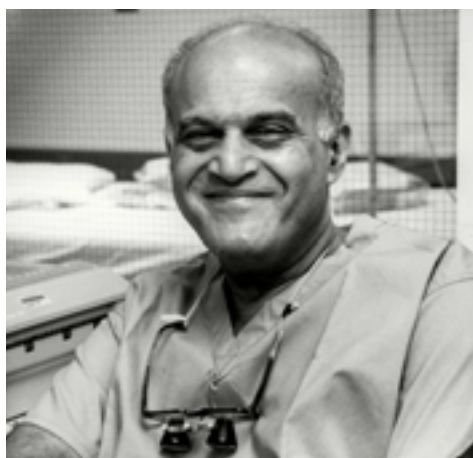
She says: "It was very scary. I was fine and then overnight I wasn't. The damage my heart suffered meant I was on the transplant waiting list for a while. But I was lucky. The LVAD helped my heart to recover and after 18 months the doctors and nurses were able to remove it.

**"It was a lifeline for people on the donor heart waiting list."**





Artificial hearts through the decades – at the top is the early 'pulsatile' device, and at the bottom is the new generation, more compact continuous flow device



Professor Sir Magdi Yacoub pioneered Harefield's artificial heart programme

"I have so much to thank staff for. There were so many people involved who kept me alive. I remember my son was only 13 months at the time, and he learned to walk in the corridors at Harefield. I still take medication, but you'd barely know I'd had heart failure. I go running, and I have a daughter now too, who we adopted two years ago. I will

always be incredibly grateful."

Harefield's highly trained team of specialists now also includes consultant cardiothoracic and transplant surgeon, Mrs Maria Monteagudo Vela. She said: "Patients with heart failure who come into our care are very, very unwell. Each will need individualised therapy.

"Investment in the latest artificial heart device technology means we have all the tools available to offer that level of personalised care – and often, a final chance at life. This is why mechanical circulatory support can be an extremely rewarding area of cardiothoracic medicine.

"This is especially the case at Harefield. Who would think, in this small village location, a family of such extraordinarily skilled and experienced clinicians are performing such cutting-edge procedures?"

Harefield's work to develop artificial hearts and improve transplantation continues to this day, saving the lives of many patients.

## What is a left ventricular assist device (LVAD)?

An LVAD is a pump used to help the heart circulate blood around the body. Powered by external batteries, it is attached to the heart.

It works by moving blood from the main pumping chamber of the heart (left ventricle) into the main artery (aorta), where it is then carried to all parts of the body.

Early 'pulsatile' LVADs mimicked the heart's natural rhythm. However, these were large and could only support a patient's heart for up to 2 years.

The current generation of 'continuous flow' LVADs are smaller, more durable and have a high-speed rotor to move the blood around the body. They represent a major technological breakthrough and an opportunity for long-term support of a patient's heart.

As Professor Ian Abbs prepares to step down from his role as Chief Executive, **Jacob Lipman** finds out about his inspiring career.



Ian as a medical student at St Thomas' Hospital



Ian at the launch of the Epic electronic patient record system

## Five decades of service

**Professor Ian Abbs joined the Guy's and St Thomas' family as a medical student in 1978. He later became a renal consultant at Guy's Hospital, working on the frontline to treat patients and leading innovative research into organ transplantation.**

After several years, he moved into clinical management, helping to run our Trust's vital services and ensure that we are providing the best possible care to patients.

Since being appointed Chief Executive in 2019, Ian has overseen significant changes across the Trust, as well as some of the greatest challenges faced by the NHS during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We also welcomed our colleagues at Royal Brompton and Harefield into the Trust in 2021, and launched our new Epic electronic patient record system in 2023. His legacy reflects a remarkable five decades of dedicated service to the patients, staff and families that make up our Guy's and St Thomas' community.

### What first inspired your decision to study medicine?

As a teenager, I was always interested in transplantation and how the body reacts to foreign objects. I therefore initially thought I wanted to have a scientific career in immunology. However, I met a university professor who advised me that I could still learn about all those things through studying medicine. And so I thought, okay, I'll try for medicine instead.

### What initially brought you to Guy's and St Thomas'?

I was the first in my family to go to university and didn't know much about the different medical schools. One day, I was on the Route 53 bus when I happened to pass St Thomas', and saw its fountain in the hospital gardens. I recognised the fountain as it was made by the famous sculptor Naum Gabo, whose work I had recently seen at an exhibition in the Tate art gallery. I decided to take this as a sign to apply to St Thomas', and I very fortunately got in.

### What was your first experience of working in a hospital?

Before training as a medical student, I actually worked as a porter in a small hospital near where I lived. This was an amazing experience which helped me develop my understanding of how hospitals work – I got to speak to patients, serve food, take people to medical investigations, and spend time with the nurses on the ward.

### What are the biggest changes in medicine that you've seen in your career?

I've been lucky to work in medicine during a time of massive change. We've seen a revolution in biology where precision medicines can use an individual's genetic information to provide more targeted treatment for diseases such as cancer. The other big change is the digital revolution. In my early days as a doctor, people were only just starting to use computers. However, we are now using computing, artificial intelligence and data science to diagnose diseases and transform care for patients.





Prof Ian Abbs speaking at Armed Forces Day in 2024 in the St Thomas' Hospital garden

### What does it mean to be part of the Guy's and St Thomas' family?

People often say that it takes a village to raise a child. In our case, it takes a small town to look after a patient. We have almost 25,000 of the most brilliant colleagues across a wide range of roles at Guys' and Thomas'. This includes clinical staff – such as nurses, physiotherapists, pharmacists, allied healthcare professionals, and doctors – as well as managerial and Essentia colleagues who ensure our services run smoothly. Each member of staff makes an essential contribution to caring for our patients.

### What do you think makes our Trust special?

There is something so special about the spirit of Guy's and St Thomas'. This is an organisation where colleagues are hugely compassionate and always have your back. I have personally been in clinical situations where I've asked for help and I've found that the response is always: "Yes, how quickly do you need me?" or "I'll come immediately." It makes a huge difference knowing that your colleagues will always be there to help.



Ian receives his COVID-19 and flu jabs



Ian visits a book stall during Black History Month celebrations



Ian talks to anaesthetic nurse Ana Sobrel at Royal Brompton Hospital



Ian visits the maxillofacial surgery team at Guy's Hospital

### What moment of your career are you most proud of?

I would have to say leading our staff during COVID-19. Although it was a very difficult time, it was one where the compassion, dedication and inventiveness of colleagues shone through. I particularly remember one day where we had to turn one of our wards into an adult intensive care unit within 24 hours, which is not an easy thing to do. Guy's and St Thomas' really stepped up, and we had some of the best patient outcomes in the country. Many people's loved ones would not be here today without the care of our staff.

### What is the biggest challenge that you've faced?

Again, COVID-19 was definitely the biggest challenge of my career. We were having to

make so many decisions with uncertain information, particularly around the risks facing our frontline staff. I remember a moment where we were within hours of running out of personal protective equipment (PPE), and thought that we may have had to ask our staff to go without the equipment we thought they needed. We thankfully received an emergency supply of PPE delivered by the army, but those were the type of difficult decisions we had to make every day.

### What is something about the Trust that might surprise our readers?

We have an amazing collection of art across our sites, which is owned and managed by our partners at Guy's & St Thomas' Foundation. I would recommend to any patient or visitor that

they spend a moment looking at everything – from our statue of Edward VI who helped reopen the hospital in 1551, to the fantastic modern art collection at St Thomas' which was introduced when the new North Wing opened in the 1970s.

### What will you miss most about Guy's and St Thomas'?

Definitely, the people. I've been here nearly 50 years, and I've worked with the most brilliant individuals. From the teachers who trained me, to the colleagues I practiced alongside as consultant, and the people from different professions that I have worked with as the Trust has grown and developed. There are so many colleagues and friends here that I will miss.





In October 2023, we launched the Trust's new electronic patient health record system, Epic

### What comes next for you?

There are lots of things that I want to do. This is a fantastic moment for bringing new biological and digital innovations into medicine. In this country, we are great inventors, but we don't always find the right ways to bring the benefits into clinical practice to transform how we deliver care. I would love to help crack the code of how we better introduce innovation into the NHS, to accelerate the delivery of first-class care to all our patients.

### Any final words?

I've always believed that we hold this organisation in stewardship for those future patients and colleagues who come after us – and I feel privileged to have done this. To all the staff at our five hospital sites and those working in the community in Lambeth and Southwark, I want to pass on my very best wishes for what I know will be an exciting future continuing to provide ever better treatments and care to those who need it.



Ilan in the St Thomas' kitchens with chef Louisa

## Jacob Lipman

learns about an infant genetic study that is shaping our understanding of rare diseases.

# Once in a generation



The maternity research team who are leading the Generation Study at Guy's and St Thomas'

Every year, approximately 6,000 babies are born at St Thomas' Hospital.

However, what many people might not know is that our team of doctors and midwives are not just delivering babies. Behind the scenes, our maternity staff are supporting a ground-breaking research project that aims to unlock the genetic secrets of rare diseases.

Since 2024, the Guy's and St Thomas' maternity research team has been overseeing our participation in the Generation Study. Led by Genomics England, this world-leading study aims to test 100,000

newborn babies for rare genetic diseases.

As part of the study, a clinician collects a small blood sample from the umbilical cord shortly after the baby is born. Scientists then analyse the baby's DNA to screen for over 200 rare genetic conditions such as haemophilia, spinal muscular atrophy and immune system disorders.

This screening process takes a few weeks. Although no genetic conditions will be found in 99% of babies, if a baby is diagnosed with a condition, this allows them to receive early treatment through the NHS. Providing infants with earlier care may help reduce their symptoms or stop

them from becoming seriously ill.

Dr Chinthika Piyasena, consultant neonatologist, said: "The chances of your baby having a rare genetic condition are relatively small. However, by identifying a rare genetic condition very early on, parents can access the right support and treatment for their baby much earlier."

In addition to helping infants to access treatment earlier, data gathered from this study is also being used to understand more about the link between genetics and certain diseases. This information could support

medical research, helping us develop new treatments or diagnose conditions more quickly in the future.

Dr Piyasena said: "I'm thrilled that parents who come to St Thomas' Hospital to give birth, have the option to be part of this research which may not only benefit their own babies, but could also be transformational for medical research."

The maternity research team recently celebrated the milestone of having more than 500 expectant parents sign up to participate in the study. This was achieved through the exceptional effort of a large team of clinical research midwives

and practitioners, including Molly Dillon and Amy Tiltman.

Amy said: "We spend a lot of time speaking with eligible families, answering parents' and carers' questions. We are often talking to people on the phone and visiting the ward. We're also out and about in our local communities spreading the word."

Molly said: "We love meeting the women and birthing people participating in the study and supporting them during their pregnancies. It's a privilege to educate people about the value that research can offer us, both as individuals and as a nation. We've had so many fascinating conversations as a result."

This national study is being carried out in partnership with NHS England. Guy's and St Thomas' was one of the first NHS trusts to be involved in supporting this project, and is continuing to encourage any expectant parents to sign up to participate.

Molly said: "We would encourage anyone who is eligible to consider joining this world-leading study. Anyone who is over 16 years old, has an NHS number, is registered with a GP in England and is pregnant with one baby can take part."

**"It's a privilege to educate people about the value that research can offer us, both as individuals and as a nation."**

If you would like to volunteer to join the Generation Study, please register your interest at [www.generationstudy.co.uk/register-your-interest](http://www.generationstudy.co.uk/register-your-interest)



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**Alana Cullen** finds out how we can look after our teeth and gums to protect our health and wellbeing.

# Caring for your oral health

Our oral health is not just about a nice smile or preventing bad breath, it's key to our overall health and wellbeing.

To learn more about oral hygiene and why it's important, we spoke to one of our practice development nurses, Beverley Banton.

Beverley said: "Good oral hygiene helps prevent tooth decay and gum disease, whilst also playing a role in preventing chronic conditions like heart disease and diabetes."

Good hygiene helps prevent serious conditions because our mouths are essentially a 'window' to the body and one of the first lines of defence against bacteria. Cleaning our teeth and flossing 2 times a day helps keep the bacteria in our mouths at a safe level.

However, if these bacteria build up, it can lead to tooth decay and gum disease. In certain people, the same bacteria can also be linked to higher risks of heart disease.

Beverley added: "A healthy smile also boosts self-confidence and helps with good nutrition, as it allows you to eat and speak with confidence."

To get into the habit of regular tooth brushing and flossing, start as early as possible. If you have young children, start brushing as soon as their first tooth appears which can be as early as 6 months old. Make it into a family routine and supervise them until they are at least 7



Practice development nurse Beverley Banton demonstrates effective toothbrushing

years old.

You should also take your child to the dentist when their first tooth appears. This will help them become familiar with the environment and get to know the dentist.

Regular dental check-ups are important every 6 months, or as frequently as your dentist recommends, for early detection and prevention.

It isn't only your cleaning habits that affect your teeth and gums. Your diet and lifestyle can affect this too. Try to avoid sugary and acidic foods, and make sure you drink plenty of water. Eating crunchy vegetables is also good for your teeth!

For more information about how to take care of your teeth and gums, search 'NHS Oral Health' on your web browser.

## Quick top tips

We spoke to one of our dental hygienists, Lourdes Flindall, who shared her top tips for good oral health:

- 1 **Brush your teeth 2 times a day for 2 minutes with fluoride toothpaste**
- 2 **Use floss or interdental brushes every day to clean between your teeth**
- 3 **Cut down on sugary foods and drinks to reduce the risk of tooth decay**
- 4 **Quit smoking and limit your alcohol intake to protect your gums**

## Alana Cullen

learns how diverse prosthetics are helping cancer patients feel their best after surgery.

# Helping patients feel their best



Allison received breast cancer care at Guy's Cancer Centre

Every patient deserves to feel their best, and have care that is tailored to their individual needs.

Guy's Cancer Centre is therefore offering soft breast prostheses, known as 'softies', in a variety of skin tones to breast cancer patients recovering from surgery. This has been made available thanks to funding from Guy's Cancer Charity.

A softie is a lightweight fabric breast shape to put inside your bra. It is often worn by patients immediately after they have had a mastectomy, an operation to remove a breast. These can be worn temporarily, or in the long-term as some people find them more comfortable than other prosthetic options.

Previously, softies were only available in one colour, a pale pink. However, thanks

**"Getting different colours for people with different complexions is so important as people will feel more comfortable."**

to work led by The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust in partnership with Nubian Skin, softies are now available in a variety of skin tones for the first time.

Allison Forrester was diagnosed with breast cancer earlier this year after going for a local breast cancer screening. The 57-year-old who lives in Catford, south east London, said: "It was quite a shock as I wasn't expecting it. However, I was lucky it was caught early at my mammogram."

Following tests, Allison had a single mastectomy operation at Guy's Cancer to remove the tumour. Although she was scared, Allison was reassured by the fantastic clinical team who cared for her throughout the process.

"Everyone was very reassuring and



Our soft breast prostheses are now available in a variety of skin tones

uplifting, and helped me through from beginning to end. Even the aftercare was really brilliant, and there was always someone at the end of the phone.

"Everything went like clockwork. I had cancer and then it was removed





The breast cancer nurse team at Guy's Cancer Centre, holding the 'softies'

during the surgery."

After surgery, Allison, who is a Black woman, was given a softie that matched her skin tone.

Reflecting on the importance of offering our patients these softies, Allison said: "Getting different colours for people with different complexions is so important as it will look better, and people will feel more comfortable wearing it. It just blends into to my skin and is so comfortable.

"It gives me great comfort to have the softie, and it doesn't feel like you've lost a breast."

Georgina Bitsakou, a consultant plastic surgeon specialising in breast cancer, has led the new softies project. Ms Bitsakou, who is Allison's surgeon, said: "I am very happy to have been able to introduce these new softies to patients at Guy's Cancer.

"We care for a diverse population of women from different backgrounds, and

we needed to have more skin tone colours. It makes such a difference for the patient's body image and their emotions around breast removal.

"We hope that offering these new softies will help women from the global majority have better, more tailored care following mastectomies, feel more included and thought of, and help increase their confidence after surgery."

At Guy's Cancer, we care for patients across Lambeth and Southwark, two of the most ethnically diverse local authorities in England.

Ali Momin, director of funding and impact at Guy's Cancer Charity, said: "We are so pleased to fund these softies. Our aim is to support Guy's Cancer to offer each patient the best possible care, and ensure a more equitable health service for patients."

## Catch breast cancer early

Anyone registered with a GP as female will be invited for NHS breast screening every 3 years between the ages of 50 and 71.

If you have any symptoms of breast cancer, even if you have recently had a clear breast screening, contact your GP:

- A lump or swelling in your breast, chest or armpit
- Any changes in your breasts or nipples that are not normal for you
- A change in size or shape of 1 or both breasts

## Behind the scenes

**Mercedes Esprit**, violence and aggression reduction officer at the Trust

### Q What does your job involve?

**A** My role is to review any incidents of violence and aggression that are reported in our hospitals. I alert matrons or sisters on the wards to these incidents. After this, I make sure that staff wellbeing checks are carried out.

Every week, I have a meeting with the security management team. We decide whether violent or aggressive patients should be given a behavioural contract.

Another option is for us to call a meeting with other hospital teams to decide what action should be taken.

### Q What can be done to tackle violence and aggression?

**A** A priority is for hospital staff to feel safe. I hold training sessions for staff on protecting their personal safety and developing conflict resolution skills.

Staff need to understand how to manage patients who may have experienced trauma. At the same time, the Trust has robust policies and procedures to manage violence and aggression.

### Q What skills do you need in your job?

**A** I need to show compassion to staff who have experienced violent or aggressive behaviour. The role demands personal resilience because the details of these incidents can be distressing. I also listen to the perspectives of patients who may be struggling with difficult issues.

Other important skills are communicating confidently and responding quickly to what is happening in the busy hospital environment.



### Q What do you find rewarding about your job?

**A** The most rewarding part of my job is supporting hospital staff who have experienced upsetting incidents. I give these individuals the chance to reflect on what has happened and their own wellbeing.

My aim is to make staff feel supported and safe returning to their area of work.

## From the frontline

**Shelley Mieres**, matron for neonatal and paediatric research at Evelina London



Over the past 7 years, I have been the matron for neonatal and paediatric research at Evelina London.

Research has a key role to play in improving patient care, preventing diseases and addressing health inequalities. It can also help us develop knowledge around new and existing treatments for children and young people.

In my role, I make sure that we have the infrastructure, expertise and resources to deliver clinical trials. My team is made up of inspirational colleagues from diverse professional groups. I work alongside highly skilled medical, nursing and support staff to set up studies at Evelina London.

I aim to make sure that all families at Evelina London have the opportunity to be involved in clinical research. Throughout their involvement in research, our teams make sure that the safety of patients is the number one priority.

I enjoy educating others about the role and contributions of clinical research nurses as a skilled expert workforce. I love that my role makes use of my clinical skills and knowledge, as well as my leadership skills, and helps shape the delivery of care for our patients.

It is so important to love what you do. I am excited about the difference our team makes in advancing clinical knowledge to provide better treatment to patients.



## Jacob Lipman

learns about the medical students who provided lifesaving care to concentration camp survivors.

# Our wartime heroes

As World War II was drawing to a close, a group of medical students from Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals volunteered for a shocking medical mission that would change their lives forever.

In the spring of 1945, British troops had entered northern Germany and successfully liberated the Nazi concentration camp, Bergen-Belsen. Inside the camp, they were met with an image of total devastation – over 60,000 prisoners suffering from starvation and disease, as well as thousands of unburied bodies.

Overwhelmed by the scale of this humanitarian crisis, the British Army urgently called back home for medical support.

Among those who answered the call were nearly 100 students from nine of London's biggest medical schools, including Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals. While these young volunteers were originally meant to travel to the Netherlands to help starving Dutch children, they quickly redirected their route to Germany.

Once the volunteers reached the camp, they were confronted with a sight they would never forget. In a letter to his family, Michael Davys, a student at Guy's Hospital, said he had encountered "scenes of indescribable horror, filth, squalor and disease". He added: "They have been dying of starvation and typhus at about the rate of 500-600 a day."

The students from Guy's Hospital who answered the call to volunteer.

Image credit: Guy's Hospital Gazette, 18th August 1945, Vol LIX no. 1489.



The London medical students who travelled to Bergen-Belsen.

Image credit: Wellcome Images via Wikimedia Commons. Public domain.

The students quickly got to work to help alleviate the suffering of the liberated prisoners. Over the next few weeks, they provided nursing care, helped distribute food, and cleaned and disinfected the camp. This work was all done in the worst of conditions without access to electricity, running water, or adequate medical supplies.

One of the first problems they faced was how to feed the camp survivors. As most prisoners had not eaten for over a week, their digestive systems had been significantly weakened and suddenly consuming solid army rations could be fatal.

To help, the students created a special drink made of diluted soup and glucose that the starving prisoners would be able to digest in small doses.

The students also worked with the Army to help build a makeshift hospital where the most critically-ill survivors could be treated quickly. Within a week, they successfully turned one of the camp huts into a treatment centre where 7,000 patients could receive urgent medical care.

Despite their youth and limited

experience, these volunteers made a critical difference. Working under the supervision of senior military medics, it is estimated that the students helped halve the death rate of the camp survivors within a month.

Just as importantly, their care and compassion brought back some dignity to lives shattered by the atrocity.

After working at Bergen-Belsen for a month, the students eventually returned home to London to continue their studies. However, their visit to the camp left a lasting physical and mental impact on them. Several students contracted typhus and tuberculosis from exposure to these diseases at the camp, and many more carried psychological scars from the horrors they had witnessed.

To this day, the legacy of these students continues to provide an important message about the role that medical professionals can provide in times of crisis. In stepping up when they were needed, these students not only saved countless lives, but helped restore humanity in a place where it had previously been lost.

# Meet the governor

Newly elected governor **Kathryn Blake** describes how she plans to use her experience to represent the voice of patients, carers, staff and communities.

Guy's and St Thomas' governors represent the views of our patients, public and staff members, ensuring the Trust's services meet the needs of the communities we serve.

Our newly elected governor Kathryn Blake previously worked as an NHS consultant for 30 years caring for babies needing neonatal intensive care. She also has experience of being a patient at the Trust and has received expert care at Guy's Cancer Centre after being diagnosed with cancer during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kathryn said: "During my cancer journey, I was really impressed with my care at Guy's and St Thomas'. My consultants, nurses and their teams were

fantastic and compassionate, and everyone went out of their way to make my experience as best as it could be.

In 2022, Kathryn became a 'patient partner' with Guy's Cancer User Group, supporting patient and public involvement and engagement to help improve cancer services. She also contributes her ideas and experiences to support the work of Cancer Research UK and the South East London Cancer Alliance.

She said: "I stood for election to become a patient governor because I am committed to shaping the future of patient care at the Trust, representing the patient's voice and championing equity of access to high-quality, safe and compassionate care.



"Having recently retired from over 40 years in NHS clinical work, I now have the time, energy and enthusiasm to give something back to Guy's and St Thomas' by volunteering my time and experience both as a former clinical leader and a current patient."

# Meet the member

**Melanie Cordrey** shares what being a member means to her.

Guy's and St Thomas' members are made up of staff, patients, and public volunteers.

Members can get involved by providing feedback on how we can improve our services to meet the needs of our communities.

Melanie Cordrey, 50, from Lincoln, became a member of Guy's and St Thomas' in August 2024.

Melanie has a strong personal connection to the Trust. In 1989, she received a heart transplant at Harefield Hospital at the age of 14. As an adult, she has additionally undergone further heart surgeries at the Trust, as well as treatment for PTLT, a rare type of blood cancer.

She said: "The transplant team are amazing at Harefield and they've known me a long time. I even remember one doctor who retired a few years ago who was a trainee doctor when I started, so I saw him through his medical career.



"I hope my story gives hope to other patients that you can still have a long life after your transplant."

Melanie was formerly an administrative staff member in the NHS. After retiring early in 2023 due to her

health conditions, she decided to become a member of Guy's and St Thomas'. Since becoming a member, she has enjoyed attending members' seminars about research and innovations taking place across the Trust.

She said: "I used to like hearing about the clinical side in my NHS role and thought it would fill that void. I also particularly wanted to keep up to date with what was happening at Harefield.

"It's very interesting – you'll be surprised at what you can learn. I also enjoy how being a member lets you provide feedback to the Trust, helping you feel that you can make a difference."

To become a member call **020 7188 7346**, email [gstt.members@nhs.net](mailto:gstt.members@nhs.net) or visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership)



# Get involved and make a difference

## Sign up and help us shape your services

We involve patients, their families, carers and Foundation Trust members in planning, designing, improving and monitoring the services and care that we provide.

### How to sign up

Complete this form – <https://bit.ly/PPInvolvement> – to tell us what interests you. We will get in touch when there are opportunities to get involved.

### Current opportunities for children's services

We are looking for young people, parents and carers who are interested in improving services at Evelina London to join our Youth Forum and Involvement Register. To find out more and get involved, please email [gstt.elchengagement-pf@nhs.net](mailto:gstt.elchengagement-pf@nhs.net)

### Make a difference to maternity and neonatal care

We want to hear from parents who have used maternity or neonatal services to join the St Thomas' Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership. To find out more and get involved, please email [stthomasmnvp@gmail.com](mailto:stthomasmnvp@gmail.com)

### Other opportunities

You can also help us to improve our:

- heart and lung services
- cancer and surgery services
- local community health services

### Events and activities

We involve people in different ways, such as workshops, interviews and advisory groups. Some events are held online and others face-to-face. We will adapt activities to help you take part wherever we can.

### Find out more

If you have any questions, email [gstt.getinvolved@nhs.net](mailto:gstt.getinvolved@nhs.net) or call 020 7188 6808.

## Raise money for your hospitals and community services

For all the latest news about our amazing fundraisers and how you can support us, follow:

 [facebook.com/GSTTCharity](https://facebook.com/GSTTCharity)

 [facebook.com/evelinalondonchildrenscharity](https://facebook.com/evelinalondonchildrenscharity)

 [facebook.com/RBHCharity](https://facebook.com/RBHCharity)

 [facebook.com/guyscancerc](https://facebook.com/guyscancerc)

## COMPETITION

We have a **luxury bundle of Baylis & Harding beauty products** to give away. To be in with a chance of winning, simply complete the wordsearch below.

E	V	E	T	S	S	U	M	M	E	R	Z
G	S	U	N	G	L	A	S	S	E	S	H
A	P	X	J	U	E	E	B	D	M	D	O
T	L	B	P	R	D	O	N	I	E	L	L
T	J	H	C	A	E	B	W	C	N	A	I
O	F	N	C	Y	U	S	K	E	I	V	D
C	U	R	B	P	R	C	J	L	H	I	A
S	A	A	U	K	H	I	H	O	S	N	Y
E	D	I	S	A	E	S	L	L	N	R	D
J	K	X	I	P	O	O	L	L	U	A	N
B	A	R	B	A	R	A	U	Y	S	C	A
T	O	W	E	L	P	I	C	N	I	C	S

beach      deckchair      picnic      summer      sunshine  
carnival      holiday      pool      suncream      swim  
cottage      lolly      seaside      sunglasses      towel

Name

Address

Telephone

Email

Send your entry by **Wednesday 15 October 2025** to the GiST competition, Communications Department, 4th floor, Staircase C, South Wing, St Thomas' Hospital, Westminster Bridge Road, SE1 7EH; or you can email [gstt.gist@nhs.net](mailto:gstt.gist@nhs.net).

The winners will be selected at random and notified within seven days of the draw. The result will be final and we will not enter into any correspondence regarding the competition winners. The prize is non-transferable. Your name and details will be collected solely for the purposes of this competition and in order to be able to contact the winner and send them the prize. By entering this competition, you give your consent for us to use the data you provide in this way.

# Guy's & St Thomas' Charity &...



## 19-20 September 2025

Take the 160 feet plunge down St Thomas' Hospital as we celebrate 10 years of this iconic fundraising event.



Scan the QR code or visit [gsttcharity.org.uk/abseil](https://gsttcharity.org.uk/abseil) to sign up today.

**Care never stands still. And neither do we.**

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