

Incorporating The Messenger, The Musketeers' newsletter. Support group for those caring for a person with MS in North Staffordshire, and part of the North Staffs. Branch.

Letter from the Chairman

Hello members,

I hope you are having a good summer even though the weather hasn't been at its best, on the bright side hot weather isn't usually the best for people with MS ...I'm clutching at straws here ok .

Our summer was brightened up by the success of the Staffordshire MS Roadshow at the North Staffs hotel which reflected well on the branch, the partnership and of course the organizer Lin Hulme...thank you Lin from all of us.

Finally I have been assured that the problems we have been experiencing with the renewal of membership by HQ are being resolved.... as is the location of Lord Lucan and the identity of the man on the grassy knoll.

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Noticeboard

WHAT'S ON

Branch meetings are held at Fenton Community Hall, Manor Street, Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent on the 4th Monday of each month, 7.30pm unless otherwise stated.

BRANCH PROGRAMME FOR 2009

September 28th Community Police
October 26th Fish and Chip Supper
November 23rd Annual Draw
December 18th Christmas Dinner

MUSKETEERS' PROGRAMME 2009

September 16th Quiz Night, Holy Trinity Church Centre, Newcastle
October 21st Shaffers Restaurant, Dresden.
November 18th Games Evening – Wii Board.
December 9th Blue Room, Stone.

YOUNG GROUP

Meet on 2nd Thursday of the month, 8pm at the Orange Tree, Newcastle. For further information contact Sara Morris on 01782 373754

YMCA Mondays

Every Monday 12noon - 4pm. Variety of activities including medimotion bikes, aromatherapy, beautician, manicurist, cardmaking, glass painting and more.
£3 per session

YOGA

Every Wednesday 2pm - 3pm at Fenton Community Hall, Manor Street, Fenton. £3 per session.

DISCLAIMER: The views expressed in this publication are individual and not necessarily the view or policy of the MS Society and its supporters.

Fundraising

CHRISTMAS COFFEE MORNING

27th NOVEMBER, 2009
10.30 A.M. - 12.30 P.M.



ST. PETERS CHURCH ROOM, CHEADLE ROAD, BLYTHE BRIDGE
(Opposite Blythe Bridge High School)

Pauline Hardwick has kindly agreed to host yet another Coffee Morning on our behalf. Due to the popularity of the previous coffee mornings Pauline has hired the above premises. Do come along and support Pauline. All are welcome. Wheelchair access.

Fundraising

Hello and a big thank you to everyone who has helped in collections this year, future dates for your diary are:

10th - 11th October at Trentham Garden Centre
12th - 13th November at Morrisons Etruria
28th - 29th November at Trentham Garden Centre

Your Annual Draw tickets will soon be with you and I hope you will all try to sell as many as possible, this is our main income for the year and as such it is very important that we do well so we can continue to help our members over the coming year.

Our Thanks go to Margaret Vernon and Jayne Chew. They managed to raise 50 pounds from a cake sale on a stall at the Barlaston Cricket Club summer fete. It's thanks to donations like this that keep the branch going in these tough economic times. If you are thinking of having a stall or car boot sale this winter, why not think about donating some of the proceeds to your local branch? You may find that you sell more when people know you'll be donating!

Support News

Support report

Well our hot dry promised summer never materialised and by how quickly the times gone since I accepted the support officer post.

I am enjoying meeting you all and gradually getting to know everyone. The support team has a new helper who many of you will know that is Linda Walker and I would like to thank her for joining the team.

We are busy organising the next Getting to Grips course which will be held on November 11th 2009. Along with the M.S. nurses we have changed the format of the day as well as shorting it a little to try to make it more enjoyable and less tiring for everyone.

Can I thank all the committee members for their invaluable help and regular prompts when I forget or miss anything!

Thank you also to my support team members for their hard work and dedication to helping people with M.S.

For those of you who do not come to the Y.M.C.A. Mondays or the Branch Meetings or any of the other activities can I say you are really missing out on some brilliant days. Why not ring me so that I can give you the full details or I will post them to you. These activities are not about M. S. but about being part of a caring interesting club, friendship and support.

My very best wishes and love to you all Colin.

North Staffordshire MS Roadshow

The first North Staffordshire MS Roadshow opened its doors to the public on 1st July to blazing sunshine and a continuous flow of visitors to the many and varied stands on show. People travelled from as far as Cannock, Burton-on-Trent and Tamworth, as well as our own members plus many new faces, to visit what turned out to be an extremely successful day full of information, sample therapy sessions, equipment to try, plus entertainment from our own members, Krystian Mann and a Tai Chi demonstration. Feedback on the day was very positive with many compliments on the organization and order of the day, brought about by our very able compere Peter Duncan, who made the day flow admirably.

The day was funded by the Branch Partnership (ie Biddulph, Congleton, Leek Branch, S.E. Cheshire, North Staffs. and Stafford & District Branches) with the majority of the organizing being done by Lin Hulme. A huge thank you to Lin for masterminding the event and for all her hard work and vision on what proved to be a brilliantly successful day – the largest event taken on by a Branch Partnership. Congratulations Lin on a job well done.

Christine Green

Quotes from North Staffs Branch

Lin Hulme (diagnosed 1999.)
01782 504493

I can recall when I was first diagnosed feeling very isolated. I knew a lot about Multiple Sclerosis, as I was a District Nursing Sister at the time. I soon realised that my knowledge was about anatomy and physiology, and management of the condition in the people on my caseload and not about how it felt to have it: the psychological impact. I had never considered how it felt to have a condition that I would have for the rest of my life, and the progression of which I had no control over. Talking to other people with MS reassured me that the isolation, fear and anxiety I experienced initially was normal. People within the local branch were happy to discuss anything that concerned me, and I soon realised that I still had a very positive future ahead of me. Since joining the North Staffs Branch I have had many new opportunities such as abseiling, skydiving, and organised events for other people with MS. I look back and think of how frightened, isolated and depressed I was initially and know that joining the local branch, was the most important and the best decision I have made since being diagnosed.

Fiona Farrell (diagnosed 2008)
01782 283099

Initially I was advised to contact the local MS Branch by Nikki Embrey, my MS nurse specialist. The support officer came round to help me fill in DLA forms and gave me advice about the blue badge, discounts at the theatre and loads of other information about everyday practicalities. Once I felt a bit happier about my finances, we chatted about life with MS. At that time I spent every day on my own. I had no family within 50 miles and other than my son, I was very isolated. The support officer told me about the different groups that the local branch ran and encouraged me to go along to a meeting. That was about a year ago. I now feel like a part of a big family. The support and friendship has been invaluable. A real lifeline. I now have a full social life. I attend an activity/fitness group each Monday held at the local YMCA. On Wednesdays I go to the regular yoga group run by the branch. Once a month I join the "young group", a group for people under 40ish, where we have a laugh together down the pub. Everyone in the branch is upbeat and so friendly. I can't believe how much things have changed in the last 12 months...from being on my own and isolated, depressed and withdrawn. Now I am much happier and enjoy getting out. I have made many friends and have started helping with fundraising as I want to give something back to the branch. It may sound dramatic, but the North Staffs Branch saved my life.

Makes Sense

SHOPPING SAGA by Jill Bath

Shopping. Not very exciting is it, but it's something we all have to do on a regular basis whether we like it or not. The other half and I think we've finally got it sorted to suit our lifestyle after 18 months of experimenting, so I thought I'd pass on the fruits of our labour.

Rob hates shopping, a fact he will admit quite readily. He would of course always come with me, if requested, but not with a very good grace if truth were known. We did already have a six week menu as a result of a long ago relapse, which ended up with our having Chicken Tikka Massala 3 times in one week and me being fed up with the eternal "what are we having for dinner" question, and my answering that I didn't know but would welcome any suggestions. So we thought that was a good place to start.

We already had a chest freezer in the garage as well as a small one inside, so we started checking out the 'freezeability' of our stock items, i.e. bread, milk etc., as well as the already cooked items such as home cooked dinners and sandwich fillings, and we haven't looked back. I now have a six week delivery from a well known supermarket. It takes about 3/4 of an hour to unload and put away, is delivered on a day and at a time that suits us, and costs £3.50 to £4. (I know a lot of people who do this weekly but I'm afraid we can't afford £4 for £40 of shopping).

I use quite a few cook-in sauces as a base for meals, with additions to suit us, and I now cook doubles (most of these jars etc are made for 4 and the family has got smaller, not larger) so it also halves the cooking in a lot of cases. As anyone with M.S. knows, any way you can cut down on labour is a good idea. My slow cooker (which was originally bought for the low power consumption when we had a caravan) has never been so well used, and if you've got to chop up the onions and veg. for a beef stew and have the oven on for two hours, it takes very little more time and no more electricity to cook double. The menus are not cast in stone, but the idea is always there on a list on the wall and we can very easily alter things to accommodate unexpected nights out or sudden visitors. I now have a basic list for the shopping, which means I rarely forget things anymore (another annoying M.S. symptom). I have learned to take advantage of, say, the supermarket's own bagged rice

(cook two at a time and freeze one) which can be far more easily lifted from a pan of boiling water than using a colander, and if a friend gives me a cabbage from the allotment I cook it all in one go straight away (retaining the vitamin value), bag it in portions, use one, and freeze the rest.

I still go to the supermarket, but I now only have to go once a fortnight to choose my own meat, fruit, veg., etc. I can use a small trolley which, by leaning on, I can manage myself quite easily, even around a large supermarket (and can even have a look at the clothes, which I could never really do before because Rob would stand there looking bored and glancing at his watch).

Our bread freezes fine as long as you suck the excess air out of the bag and defrost in a smaller sealed plastic bag. Skimmed and semi-skimmed milk can both be frozen but sadly not full cream (it explodes the plastic container). Cooked meats can also be frozen, as can oatcakes, pikelets, muffins, brioche etc. You would be amazed at what can be frozen. As for the menu list, I can recommend it to everyone. We started off with a few obvious favourites and found ourselves adding regularly for another fortnight, with a sudden "what about so and so, we haven't had that for ages" and a "have you thought about x". After a month or so we had a six week menu with a very good mix and no repeats! We obviously allow for seasonal variations and bargain buys ('buy one get one free') but everything is in the house for at least the next fortnight, so if I'm not too good or even disaster strikes, we're covered. Rob can either cook (he's actually not bad really, especially at CTM from a jar) or there's something in the freezer ready to be defrosted. Of course the other big bonus of all this has been the considerable cost saving. We have found that the menu and the shopping list mean we now waste very little food as it's more planned, and we now make lists which all these money saving programmes tell you to do anyway. When you live on a reduced income because of the M.S., this can make a big difference. Happy Shopping.

Please send contributions to the 'Makes Sense' column, however short, to Judith Monks, tel. 01782 622192, email j.a.monks@btinternet.com.

(Please say whether or not you would like your name to be published).



Your News

LADIES on Tour



A Few of us women decided to have a break away together. We all have our disabilities M.S, Fibromyalgia etc, we decided to go on a coach trip and see how well they catered for disabled people. Here is how it went down:-

We booked with Proctors on the trip "Emmerdale Country" which was good as we could drive to the local depot leave the car there and board the bus with our luggage. We then got in a bit of bother for not telling them when booking that we were taking wheelchairs with us, so in future we were told to let them know, they put them on anyway and away we went. The coach was great it had seatbelt, tea and coffee on sale, and the added bonus of an emergency toilet, boy was that handy!

Our first stop was Southport, we were dropped off near the main street (Lord street) and then found our way to the shopmobility place there in Tulketh st, where we had pre-booked 6 scooters. The staffs there were ace and after a form to fill in and £4 for the day hire, we had a quick lesson and off we all went. Shame we didn't take this picture outside shopmobility though eh?

We then went to Southport front. It is very clean and easily accessible, apparently they have spent over 9 million refurbishing it and it is great, with cinema, bowling, restaurants and shops every women's dream. We found a pub on the Ocean Plaza, a wacky warehouse that did meal deals (two for £9). The staff were very helpful and waited on us and the food was very good. After lunch and a drink (don't know if you should ride under the influence) we had to make our way back through town to shopmobility. One of us decided the quickest way off the shooter was to fall to the ground, thanks to the staff there she was carefully raised like



the Mary Rose and just a few bruises to show off later. We had booked a local taxi firm to pick us up and drop us where the coach was picking us up again. We then went to our hotel from there (Britannia Hotel, Wigan) which was great, the rooms were clean and spacious, all on-suite with TV and coffee making facilities. It is about 4 miles from Wigan in a residential area. After our evening meal we chilled in the lounge bar, the staff were friendly and approachable, which we found out when one of us locked the key card in our room, OOPS!



We were up early at 8am for full buffet breakfast, which was a bit busy and carrying food for a few of us was challenging. Then we were packed up and back on the coach for 9am. First stop was Skipton which was a lovely village where there was a street market and lovely courtyards with Tearooms and shops. We had a couple of hours there (which we felt was too short) then back on the coach. Next stop was Harrogate, a lovely place with good shops. We went to the bake shop and sat on a wall for a snack (my advice don't sit on plastic bags they're slippy as one of the ladies found out and ended up with her legs in the air in a bed of marigolds (LOL), Her nickname is now Marigold. After a few hours back on the coach and heading towards Guiseley this is where "Emmerdale Farm" was filmed before it was taken in studios. The 2nd day was a bit of rushing about we found for us with disabilities but nevertheless we had a great time and never stopped laughing. We were definitely ready for a drink at "The Woolpack" before heading home though.



Compost Heap

Garden jobs to do now

Bulbs of all kinds can be bought now for spring colour next year. Everyone always used to go for good old daffodil. Now even the humble daffodil can be bought in all sorts of shapes and sizes. You can choose from Hyacinths, Tulips, Alliums and Crocus.

Bulbs can be planted in your lawn for a less formal arrangement. Make sure you plant them a lawnmowers width apart, so you can keep your lawn trim when it starts growing again early next year.

Anything goes colour wise. I feel the brighter the better! When spring does finally come around the colour will make us all feel energised. Try and plant according to size with taller tulips in the rear of the borders and maybe smaller crocus in the forefront. There are different sizes of almost every species of bulb. Make sure you check the 'final size' on the back of any packets you buy.

Tips for buying:

Always buy from a reputable source. Buy bulbs that have a papery skin but are firm underneath. Get bulbs that have potential. One that already has 2 or 3 shoots visible. Don't be tempted to use old bulbs, they won't flower!

Finally send us some photos of your wonderful gardens to be included in future issues!



The compost heap in this issue concentrates on what happens to our gardens during the extreme weather that we have been experiencing.

Waterlogged soil

When soil is waterlogged, plants literally drown. Water fills all the air spaces between the soil particles and this prevents oxygen from reaching the roots. In turn, this causes the soil to stagnate and prevents root growth.

Symptoms:

Plants may look like they need water because symptoms include yellowing leaves that wither and drop off. Wilting of the plant may also occur. The surface of the soil is soaking wet with puddles on it. When lifted, the plant roots are black, soft and soggy, and the soil smells of rotten eggs. Plant growth is stunted or plants fail to sprout and shoots die back.

Soil compaction

After prolonged rainfall, soil becomes waterlogged. And if walked on or driven over, the soil becomes compacted and drainage gets worse.

Symptoms:

Water fails to drain away and puddles appear on the soil's surface. Soil turns to mud easily. Boggy lawns.

Disease

Waterlogging and compaction can create ideal conditions for diseases such as phytophthora and other fungal attacks. For example, box is prone to box blight in poorly-drained sites.

Problem solving:

Do not walk on wet soil because this aggravates compaction. Dig up waterlogged plants in pots, remove damaged parts of roots and replant in fresh, free-draining compost. Remove any dead or dying shoots. Spike lawns with a motorised spiker and add lime-free sand to improve drainage.

Problem prevention:

Apply mulch over the root area. Feed during the growing season to encourage new root growth. Water regularly in dry spells because plants are more prone to drought stress after prolonged periods of waterlogging. In clay soil, use plenty of organic matter and horticultural grit before planting to improve soil structure and drainage. Gently break down the sides of planting holes with a fork. With free-draining soil, add organic matter to bulk up the soil and add nutrients, which would be washed away in heavy rains. Build raised beds and fill with well-drained topsoil. Install a drainage system or soakaway. Dig ditches filled with gravel to drain water away from the garden or talk to a builder about a pipe drainage system if the problem is more extreme. Put crocks in the bottom of pots and place them on feet to aid drainage. **Do not** overwater pot plants.

Make the most of it

If poor drainage, flooding and waterlogging are persistent problems, it could be worth rethinking your planting scheme. Choose shrubs, trees and perennials that thrive in wet soil. Trees and shrubs that do well in moist conditions include salix, cornus, betula, sambucus, liquidambar, ash and amelanchier. Create a bog garden, which is good also for attracting wildlife. Plant irises, carex, gunnera, primulas, hostas, rheum and rodgersia. If you are planning to lay a lawn, ensure the ground is not compacted and dig in plenty of organic matter, grit and sand before laying turf or sowing seeds.

News From MS Mondays at the YMCA

Caution, men at work!!

As most of you are aware work has started on a huge expansion programme at The YMCA. It will be going on for the next 18 months and will include housing, new sports facilities and a coffee bar.

Every effort is being made to meet our needs during the upheaval, but, do **BE CAREFUL** when negotiating the new entrances and pathways. At the moment the Sports Hall is reached from the temporary car park via the dining hall or round the pathway to the right of the building.

What? Yes, another new piece of exercise equipment! We have now got a toning table for our members to use along side our bikes and power plate. The 15 minute session has many benefits including, Improving circulation and posture, stretching the hamstrings and all abdominal muscles to name but a few.

Seen below are some of our group having a go at floral art. It was amazing to see what can be achieved just by using a few leaves from our gardens and a bunch of flowers.

We never seem to run out of ideas to keep us busy on Monday afternoons. Over the last few weeks we have made fish mobiles and also coasters depicting scenes of The Potteries.



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THE MESSENGER

The MUSKETEERS

Newsletter



Part of the
Multiple Sclerosis Society
North Staffs Branch.

Charity Reg.207495



A SUPPORT GROUP FOR THOSE CARING FOR A PERSON
WITH MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS in North Staffordshire



Chairman's Report

Here we are in the middle of summer and as I write this the rain is hitting the window and the wind howling round the chimney pots and a small swimming pool has appeared outside the patio doors. The BBQ I had planned for this evening has turned into a mixed grill but I am still hoping that things might improve for the 19th August.

As the speaker was unable to come to the April we made do with a buffet, and the May meeting had to be cancelled as the equipment we were meant to use was stolen. We have had two very successful meetings in June and July though.

The joint meeting with partners for lunch at the Borough Arms was very well supported and we had a very enjoyable meal.

Joan Hick - Chairman

Fund spending

At the moment I am unable to give you the next three months programme. Once items are agreed we have to negotiate places, etc. for our meetings. However, as usual, I will be emailing or sending out postcards to keep you informed month by month.

If there is any carer reading this who would like to be informed of our monthly meetings let me have your details and I will put you on my list for either emails or cards.

You can email me on: gnjhick@btinternet.com to let me have your email address or ring me on 01782 523028 to give me your address for mailing.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Geoff Hick
Funding Officer

Sunday Lunch at the Borough Arms

As the pictures show everyone had a good time at this get together in July. This occasion looks as if it might be turning into an annual event.





THE MUSKETEERS



The following website contains lots of helpful information and advice for carers
The Government's directory of information for carers www.carers.gov.uk

Carer

Here are some thoughts from fellow Musketeers.

Someone totally responsible for someone else.
To look after someone.
Be responsible for someone else.
To care for someone.
To help and assist when needed.
Giving up your dreams and ambitions
A better word would be supporter or aid

Carer's Commandments

1. Thou shalt not try to be all things to all people
2. Thou shalt not be perfect, or even try
3. Thou shalt leave things undone that ought to be done
4. Thou shalt not spread thyself too thin
5. Thou shalt learn to say no
6. Thou shalt schedule time for thyself and thy supportive network
7. Thou shalt switch off and do nothing regularly
8. Thou shalt be boring, inelegant, untidy and unattractive at times
9. Thou shalt not feel guilty
10. Thou shalt not be thine own worst enemy

Train ride

The July meeting saw The Musketeers at yet another new venue. The evening was spent at the Churnet valley Railway at Cheddleton where for a few hours we were shunted back in time to the age of steam. It was not quite the same experience we had as youngsters when we eagerly boarded the train at Stoke to Rhyl or Blackpool, but it did bring back some memories.

Although we did seem to travel over the same length of track several times, we were entertained first by a group of cows who decided to amble across our path as the train chugged along and then at the end of the line by a jazz band, not once but again when the train repeated the journey. A buffet was served on route, not, thank goodness living up to the reputation of British Rail catering of times gone by. It was another good night had by all.





THE MUSKETEERS



Musketeers – June meeting



Have you ever wished you could shoot like Annie Oakley, fire arrows like Robin Hood or drive like Michael Schumacher? Well, Musketeers members experienced all three wishes in one night at their June meeting.

The Musketeers have been going to Kingsley Shooting grounds for the last two years to experience clay pigeon shooting and this year the organisers offered something different, a night of air rifle shooting, archery and blind driving.

Twelve members of the Musketeers plus various hangers on and spectators arrived at the shooting grounds in the early evening for a coffee and a safety briefing. It was really nice to see several young members (sons and daughters mostly) also there to enjoy the evening.

Firstly we experienced air rifle shooting, firing high powered rifles at a range of targets set up to try our skill. I think it's fair to say the skills of Annie Oakley were noticeably lacking although Pepe? Rose above the rest to take the competition.

Secondly, Robin Hood time, so off we went to the archery range that had been set up for us. After several practice rounds we all entered a competition to see whether the practice had done us any good. After some less than outstanding scores it came down to a three arrow shootout between two of the competitors which was won by Andy Abbott after a very impressive display.

Finally, to blind driving. Split into groups of two the object of the exercise was for each group to navigate a course with the driver being blindfolded and the second member having to navigate them through a series of obstacles and to park the jeep with voice instruction only accompanied by one of the instructors who allocated marks for our efforts. I think it's fair to say this was a most difficult and disorienting task won again by two of the youngsters, Chris and Beth, despite neither of them holding a full driving licence yet.

After all these exertions we adjourned back to the main building for refreshments (which were extremely good) and the awarding of the trophies.

Another really smashing night out for the Musketeers!

Surfing

This issue is concentrating on a great hobby to embark upon now the nights are getting shorter. What better way to spend the night than looking up your family tree? A little bit of digging can often find little surprises, just like on shows such as 'who do you think you are'. One thing I have discovered though is that it isn't a cheap hobby! Often birth and death records can be charged at around £10 a time. Don't let this put you off though as a lot of sites have introductory offers on all the time. Make use of these to start you on your way.

Probably one of the most well known site is www.ancestry.co.uk. This offers a free 14 day trial to get you started.

www.1901censusonline.com

Anyone mentioned on the 1901 census will be listed on here. This site requires that you buy credits via a credit or debit card. £5 buys you 500 credits. Data costs 10 credits, so to view any records that's what you pay. Although you'll have to work fast as credits only last 7 days.

Search online for the Channel 4 guide to genealogy, at:

www.channel4.com/history

This is a great resource full of information on how to start, where to find the all important documents and case studies. Good luck with your search. Don't forget to let us know if you have a royal bloodline!

Recipe Corner

Roasted vegetables and pasta

Ingredients

- 2 courgettes, cut into sticks
- 1 red pepper, de-seeded and cut into strips
- 2 garlic cloves, sliced finely
- 3 tblsp olive oil
- 10oz pasta shells
- 7 fluid oz tub of half fat crème fraiche
- 2 tsp whole grain mustard
- 3 oz grated cheddar cheese

Method

- 1 Preheat oven to 220c/425f/gas 7
- 2 Put the courgettes and red pepper in a roasting tin and sprinkle with the garlic. Drizzle with the olive oil, then season and toss to make sure the vegetables are coated with oil.
- 3 Roast for 15-20 minutes until they are tender and beginning to brown.
- 4 Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil. Add the pasta and continue cooking for 10-12 minutes. Drain and stir in the roasted vegetables with the crème fraiche, mustard and grated cheddar.

Serve with salad and a French stick.

John Salmon

Top Tips

A solution for damp salt. Place a few grains of rice in the salt cellar, the grains will absorb the moisture.

If you would like to make a contribution to Knotty Matters on any subject which you would like to share with members, please contact:

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Copy deadline for forthcoming issue 15 08 09

Every effort has been made to ensure that data or information supplied in 'Knotty Matters' is accurate. However, it is recommended that users of this information confirm the reliability of the data themselves as The Multiple Sclerosis Society North Staffs Branch and The Musketeers Carers Group, are not liable for any damages caused by the use of this information.

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