

Ken Jarrold CBE

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Background and career

I started in the NHS on the 14th September 1969 on the national administrative scheme with a view to becoming a Labour MP. I fell out of love with politics and in love with the NHS and nearly 52 years later, I am still here.

I spent 36 years as a full-time manager, 20 years as CEO in Gloucestershire, Wessex region, Durham and the Tees Valley. I spent 3 years working nationally as the NHS Director of HR and corporate services, and as Deputy to Alan Langlands, NHS CEO.

I retired early at 57 because of a combination of work and personal stress, and it was the best decision I have ever made in my working life. The remaining years in the NHS have been doing consultancy as a coach (for the NHS) and I have had a whole series of non-executive jobs in the NHS and wider public sector.

I am currently chair of the Council of Governors and board of directors at [Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust](#), a large specialist mental health and learning disability Trust running from Sunderland to the Scottish border and across to the West coast of Cumbria.

How do you think the pandemic has affected people's mental health?

It has had a very severe effect and we are going to feel the effects of it for many years to come. I have had personal experience of someone I am close to who has a difficult life, but has found ways of living with that, but the pandemic has pushed them over the edge. For a while it looked like we might lose them, it was a very serious situation. There are literally 100's and 1000's of people in that position.

I think we are going to see a lot more real distress and certainly it was very scary for the case that I was involved in, some of the scariest hours of my life.

There are so many ramifications from lockdown; isolation, loneliness which of course powerfully affect depression, an inability to go out and enjoy activities – our recovery colleges provide wonderful activities to those we serve and they have had to go online.

There have also been the very tragic cases of those who suffer from domestic or child abuse who have found it harder to escape from their tormentors.

So it has had a profound affect and we will experience it for many years to come.

And it is not just for those with existing mental health problems, it is the whole population that has been affected and there are many who have not been in touch with us before who will be in the coming months.

We are and will see increased demand, without question.

People are getting back into the workplace and some will have experienced trauma during this last year, and this is a great concern to both employers and employees.

— What does nature mean to you?

In general terms, nature is fundamentally about renewal, it's about the pattern of the seasons, about life going on. And I know that the planet is under threat from climate change, and therefore the awful day may come for generations yet unborn where the Spring doesn't happen and that would be truly terrifying for me. So I recognise the threat to nature but still it is so powerful and it is so ancient and just the fact of the sun rising and the plants growing is such a fundamental and elemental thing to experience. You can understand why ancient peoples worshipped the sun because the sun was everything to them; it was the giver of life.

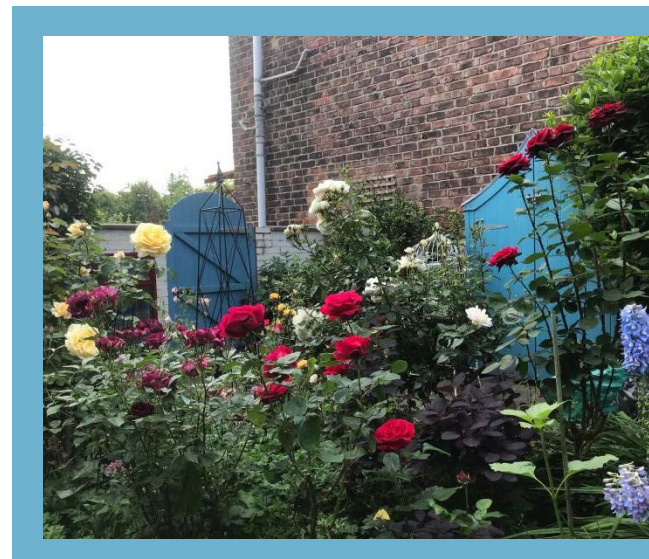
To me personally, it has become increasingly important the older I have become. When I retired early from work and personal stress, the personal stress became acute for about 18 months, and that resulted in my divorce and my coming out.

When I moved house I was in a new house with a yard, garden and two sheds. There is no doubt in my mind, that as well as all the other things I had such as counselling and support (and I would recommend that people seek professional help) making that garden and watching it grow over 13 years has undoubtedly been part of the healing process, because you can see every year an improvement. You can see the cherry tree that were planted 13 years ago now strong and tall with a great big thick trunk spreading right across the back. Just this weekend I was pruning the roses and feeding them - it's a very elemental thing brought down to the personal level that this is something that you created. I have no doubt that nature has a healing aspect for many people.

— Have you connected more with nature since the pandemic began?

Yes, I think nature has been important to people. I don't know what they would have done if they hadn't been able to get out and walk and exercise. Although the mental health aspects of the pandemic have been severe, they would have been so much more severe if outside exercise and walking had not been permitted.

I planted cherry trees in my yard garden last Autumn and I hoped that they would survive the winter - what I was totally unprepared for was the fact that they both produced blossom. That seemed to me to be extraordinary that such a small plant would produce some blossom in its first Spring. There is a lovely book about Cherry Ingram - an ornithologist initially, he developed a new interest to be the world expert in cherry trees, in fact his home was a cherry tree nursery. He managed to cultivate trees that had died out in Japan and send them back to Japan. He died on my 33rd birthday at the age of 101. Ten days before he died he was tending his cherry trees so that is the model that I am aspiring to.



Climate change:

Interviewer: Mental health and climate change, we are killing the thing that heals us.

I am ashamed of my generation and of myself that we weren't aware of this earlier or do anything about it earlier. My book [*Other People's Shoes*](#) is essentially about leadership and management and the difference between them. It is about behaviours as opposed to technical competence, which I think is really important. The distinction I make is that leadership is about showing the way and is nothing in relation to position or seniority, whereas management is clearly about position and role and seniority. So, in the book I give examples of leaders, such as Nelson Mandela. If I were writing the book now, I would use Greta Thunberg as my model. There is a girl of 12 who just by not going to school started a worldwide movement. She had no position, no authority, and she is now one of the best-known people in the world. She has become an international leader by showing the way, and that means that anyone can show the way if they know the way.

The three things I would pick out:

Healing
Peace
Hope

When you speak with people with mental health problems and their families, hope is the most important thing. We get lovely quotes in the Trust from people and I stick them on my office wall and people come and "read the wall". A mum whose son we had treated, said "We had given her back hope". It is so fundamental.

One of the great things about the Trust is that we have a large group of people who have lived experience and work for us as peer supporters. They are living symbols of hope. Our Trust enables these people to shine and provides a career structure. It is developing more and more all the time.