



## Helen Griffiths, our JAG nurse lead, wins prestigious BSG President's medal

On a sunny Tuesday in Liverpool at the British Society of Gastroenterology (BSG) annual conference, JAG nurse lead Helen Griffiths was awarded the honour of receiving the BSG President's medal for her services to gastroenterology, BSG and decontamination.

The BSG President's medal recognises individuals who have made great contributions to their specialty. Here at JAG, we are very proud of Helen's achievements and are grateful to have her as part of our clinical team.



Photo of Helen Griffiths accepting the BSG President's medal

The BSG, founded in 1937, is a professional organisation dedicated to advancing the study and practice of gastroenterology and hepatology. Every year they host a 3-day medical and academic conference, BSG LIVE, which brings together thousands of health professionals to

share the most up-to-date and cutting edge scientific advancements and innovations in gastroenterology and liver health.

### **An interview with Helen Griffiths**

We spoke with Helen, who has been working in gastroenterology for over 36 years and has contributed to endoscopy services greatly.

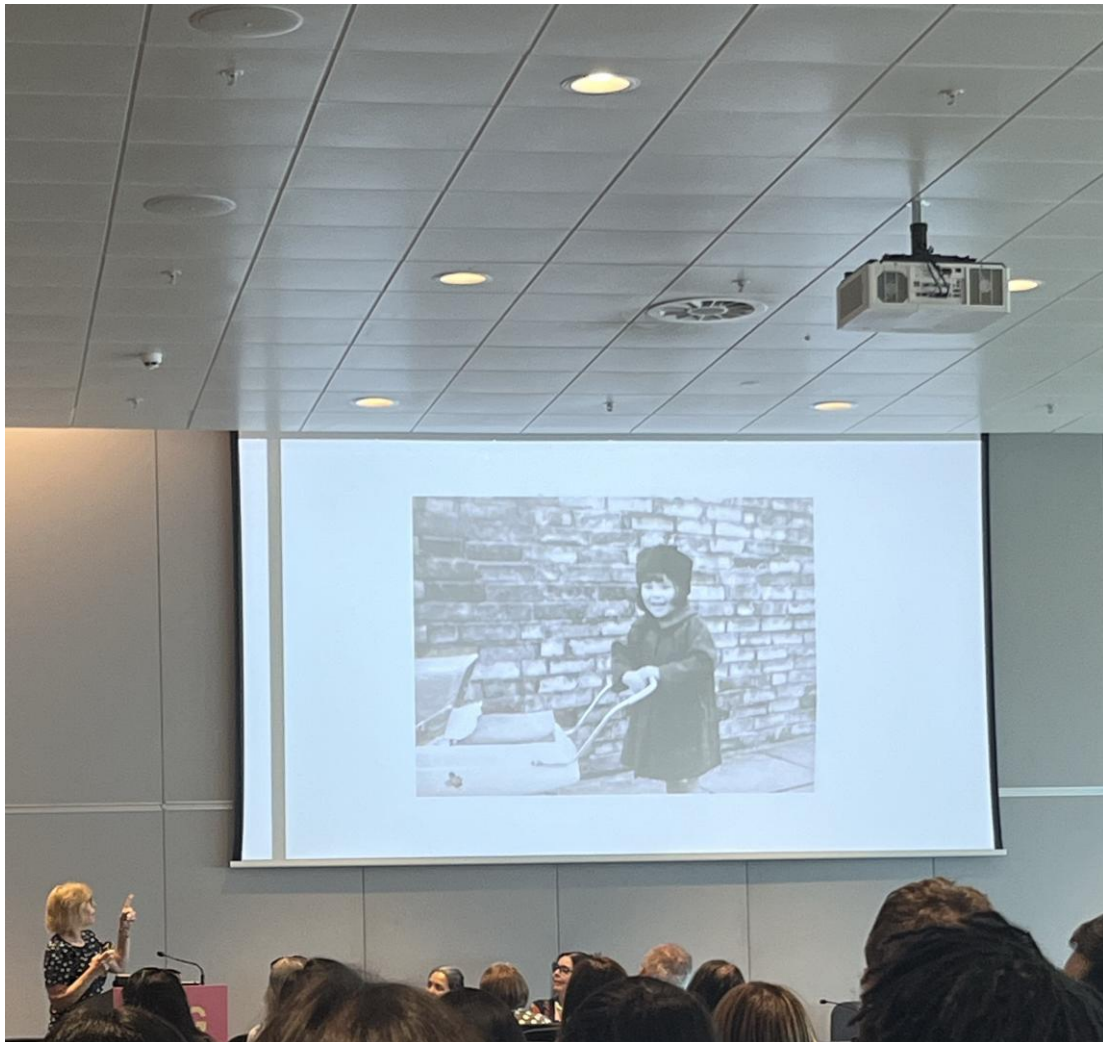
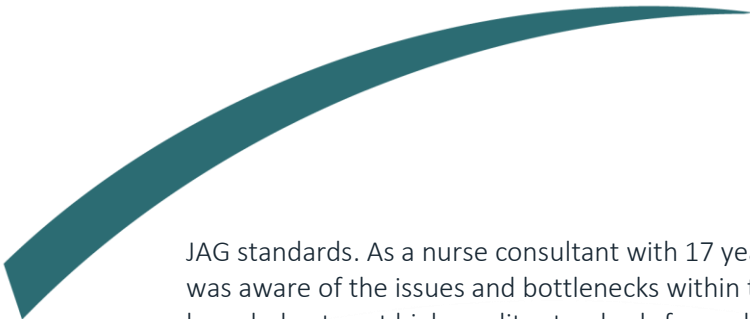


Photo of Helen Griffiths presenting at the BSG

Helen first entered the world of endoscopy when she moved to Hereford in 1990 and secured an endoscopy nurse role at the Wye Valley NHS Trust. She reminisced '**I was lucky enough to have an amazing colleague and role model in consultant gastroenterologist Dr Mike Hall**'.

Helen has had numerous roles within JAG, including lead assessor, deputy head of assessors and lead nurse, but she first got involved with JAG as the assistant clinical lead for the West Midlands Strategic Health Authority. At this time, the National Endoscopy team had been formed in order to modernise endoscopy services and Helen was involved in setting up the knowledge management system that supported the first global rating scale (GRS) – now our



JAG standards. As a nurse consultant with 17 years of endoscopy experience behind her, she was aware of the issues and bottlenecks within the speciality and wanted to use her knowledge to set high-quality standards for endoscopy services. Alongside this, JAG accreditation had become mandatory for any service wishing to participate in the English Bowel Cancer Screening Programme (BCSP) which meant that her role within JAG and as nurse advisor to the BCSP became interwoven. Helen goes on to say **‘the difference in the quality of accredited services was quickly apparent to me and I remain a firm advocate of everything that JAG and the accreditation unit provides’**.

When asked how she felt about winning the BSG President’s medal, she admits **‘I emailed them back to make sure that they had the right Dr Helen Griffiths! I was of course absolutely thrilled’**.

Helen won the BSG President’s medal due to her extensive work within endoscopy and notably decontamination. She was the decontamination and transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) adviser for BSG for 13 years and has lectured across the UK, Europe, South Africa and Middle East on this subject. She has been heavily involved in responding to advisory reports and producing international decontamination guidance as well as BSG guidance. She joked **‘I would introduce myself as “decon until I die”’**.

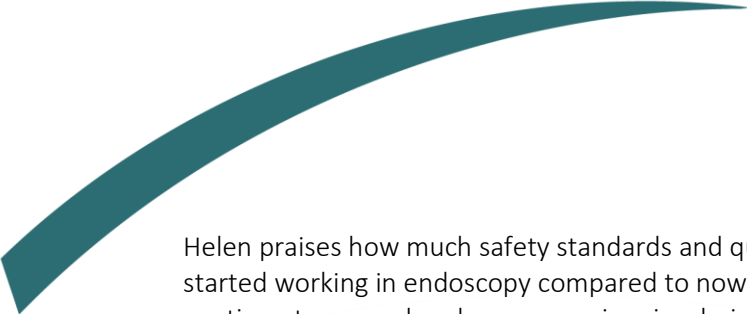
Helen praises her husband as her greatest support for the last 43 years and states she is thrilled to have him present at the conference to witness her win the award. When asked how she is going to celebrate, she replied **‘I think having the opportunity at BSG to catch up with old friends and network will be celebration enough.’**

Reflecting on the proudest moment of her career, Helen recounts that **‘receiving my doctorate in 2010 with my mum with me was probably my proudest [moment]. I had wanted to be a nurse from the age of 5 – as the eldest of four girls my father had dreams of me becoming a doctor. I made it eventually although sadly my father never got to see it. I also had a life-long fear of exams and writing, scraping through my O levels and having to resit my nursing finals and so to achieve both my master’s degree in 1998 and then my doctorate were amazing and turned the fear of writing into a passion, with many publications and a book’**.

When we discussed what the greatest challenges in her career have been, Helen advises that challenges are necessary to change. One sentence of guidance she has used to navigate her world is **‘if they shut the door on you go through the window’**. She explains how she has found numerous ‘windows’ and highlights the importance of resilience as well as passion. Those wishing to succeed must find acceptance in not winning every battle but it is still important to recognise that you did all that you could.

Helen wants the future of endoscopy to mirror the JAG standards. She acknowledges that the NHS is at a difficult impasse and that there are people who question investment in endoscopy when other services are in dire need. However, she stresses that the gold standard for endoscopy can be used as a template to improve other services within the hospital and that improvements within endoscopy translate to high-quality patient care across the board.

**‘I make no apologies for wanting high quality and safe endoscopy services.’**



Helen praises how much safety standards and quality of care have improved since she started working in endoscopy compared to now. The infrastructure, expertise and passion to continue to expand endoscopy services is admirable. She hopes that expansion of services and addressing waiting times remain a priority in endoscopy. Finally, she emphasised how important it is that endoscopy workforce and teams feel valued by their organisations and patients.

**‘We now have amazing clinicians providing complex therapeutic procedures to patients who otherwise would not have access to surgical procedures.’**

Looking to the future, Helen wants to support the nurses of the future in whatever way she can before she retires – which she is equally looking forward to!