It’s been a busy and eventful 12 months for NHS Highland since the board’s last annual review. Here, we list just some of the developments that have caught the eye within the board in 2015/16.

**Happenings**

In it, he recognised that alcohol consumption was a “normal part of a healthy society” and that there were positive associations between controlled alcohol intake and some conditions, such as cardiovascular disease.

But on the other hand, he highlighted the “significant burden of harm” associated with excessive alcohol intake.

And he said that, while there were still some positive trends, the problem of alcohol abuse in Highland remained “extremely worrying”.

He said: “We still have a major problem across NHS Highland in that 40 per cent of the population regularly drink more than the recommended limit.”

**ALCOHOL** was the subject of the most recent annual report produced by NHS Highland’s director of public health, Prof Hugo van Woerden.

**THE biggest initiative of its kind in Highland was launched on 20th May with the formal unveiling of ‘Reach Out’, an NHS Highland campaign to tackle loneliness and social isolation.**

The launch took place at Drakies Primary School in Inverness, which itself had done much to address the issue by setting up a community café for local residents.

In the Reach Out campaign individuals and organisations are being invited to sign a pledge committing them to an act which will contribute in some way to easing the problem. This can be anything from making a point of chatting to an elderly neighbour once a week to facilitating an event for people who rarely get, or don’t often take, an opportunity to socialise with others.

The campaign attracted some high-profile supporters, including the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, Shona Robison, who said: “I have personally made a pledge to do what I can to tackle loneliness in my community.”

**VETERANS First Point Highland, a mental health service for veterans, was officially launched on 20th May at Poppyscotland Inverness.**

The service is new to the Highlands and is the result of an initiative between Poppyscotland, NHS Highland and Veterans First Point Scotland.

**A CLOSER working relationship between NHS Highland and the University of the Highlands and Islands was sealed with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding which will form the basis of developing areas of common interest between the two organisations.** Joint interests include research and widening access into education and employment.
The past year has seen significant progress in the ongoing development of NHS Highland’s estate. In October last year, for example, it was announced that land had been secured for a new hospital in Fort William. The Highland Council bought a site at the Blar Mor, near the town’s health centre.

It is proposed that once funding is in place, NHS Highland transfers the site of the existing Belford Hospital to the council, with a view to the land accommodating affordable housing near the centre of town. The hope is that a replacement Belford will then be built on the Blar Mor site.

Also in October, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced that six new elective treatment centres were to be built in Scotland, with one planned for Inverness. The centres will allow people to be treated more quickly for planned surgery and the facilities will help the NHS meet increasing demand from a growing elderly population, taking pressure off unplanned and emergency treatment.

A new health centre opened its doors at the end of November. The state-of-the-art, £1.5 million Drumnadrochit Health Centre has five GP consulting rooms, a dedicated nurse and healthcare assistant consulting room and two treatment rooms, a facility for local first responders and a hot-desking office for use by visiting health and social care workers. The waiting room area can be secured from the rest of the building for out-of-hours use by various groups.

Another new NHS Highland health centre opened for business in August. During the past year the former doctor’s house in Eigg was transformed by NHS Highland into a health centre to serve residents of the Small Isles – Eigg, Rum, Muck and Canna.

In February this year, a ceremony was held at New Craig’s Hospital in Inverness to mark the start of work which will transform the hospital’s grounds. In the £500,000 greenspace initiative, the hospital’s grounds will be given a make-over for the benefit of patients, staff, visitors and the local community.

The new children’s unit at Raigmore Hospital in Inverness was opened in May. Made possible thanks to public support for a £2 million appeal by the Archie Foundation, the unit has brought the children’s medical and surgical wards, high dependency unit and out-patients’ services together into a child-friendly environment with its own entrance and its own identity.

July this year saw the start of work on the upgrade of the critical care service at Raigmore Hospital. The upgrade will bring all critical care services, which includes the Acute Medical Assessment Unit, the Intensive Care Unit, the Surgical High Dependency Unit, theatre and the admissions area, into one area over two floors. The operating theatres will be refurbished and an additional theatre will be added to bring the total number in this area to 10.

The work represents a £28 million investment over three years.

Work has been continuing on reconfiguring wards at Caithness General Hospital in Wick. The hospital’s Ambulatory Care Unit was completed following the significant redesign of the east wing of Queen Elizabeth Assessment & Rehabilitation Ward.

The new unit provides renal dialysis, chemotherapy and medical infusion services. Additional capacity for day case surgery has also been provided. In addition, there is a new multi-purpose room which includes telemedicine facilities for consultation.

Further work includes the relocation of the Bignold ward to the hospital’s top floor, of the Henderson maternity facility to a temporary site between the existing unit and the operating theatre and of the Queen Elizabeth Wing to the former Bignold Ward to provide a step-down/rehabilitation unit.

The Rosebank Wing, Caithness General’s medical and high-dependency unit, will be converted into an acute assessment unit and the A&E department will be extended by relocating the out-patients department to the ground floor.

A redesign project is under way on the north coast of Sutherland that would see the creation of a new single health and social care ‘hub’ facility.

It has been recommended that the new facility be built in the Kyle of Tongue area.

The proposal, if implemented, would mean NHS Highland would no longer provide residential care home services at Talmine (Caladh Sona) and Melvich Community Care Unit (Melvich).

Redesign projects are also under way in two other parts of north Highland.

The one in Badenoch and Strathspey would see two existing hospitals – St Vincent’s in Kingussie and Ian Charles Hospital in Grantown-on-Spey – replaced by a new facility in Aviemore.

A key part of that redesign started to take shape in January this year with work getting underway on the refurbishment of the Wade Centre, an NHS Highland-managed care home and day centre in Kingussie.

Meanwhile, progress continued to be made on the redesign of health and social care services in Skye, Lochalsh and South West Ross which would see the development of a ‘spoke’ facility in Broadford and a smaller, ‘hub’ facility in Portree.

In Argyll and Bute, the new Kintyre Community Dialysis Unit was formally opened on 20th August last year.
ONE of the biggest changes in the delivery of health and social care for many years has been taking place over the past year.

In 2012, NHS Highland took over responsibility for adult social care from The Highland Council. And on 1st April the integration of health and social care in Argyll and Bute was sealed, albeit using a different model to the one being used in North Highland.

The Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership was formed as separate entity from either the health board or the local authority, with its new Integration Joint Board holding its first meeting in August last year and formally taking over responsibility for the operation and delivery of all health and social care services in its area in April this year.

NHS HIGHLAND is constantly striving to improve and update the services it provides – and how it provides them.

To that end, it has been involved in a series of redesigns, including one in Skye, Lochalsh and South West Ross and one in Badenoch and Strathspey (see buildings).

There has also been a review of services along the north coast of Sutherland, and in Caithness (again, see buildings).

OVER the course of the past year NHS Highland’s in-house magazine, Highlights, has featured dozens of stories about the achievements of members of staff and others – too many, in fact, to mention here.

One of the most significant successes was that of Pauline Jesperson, a practice nurse partner and integrated team leader at Lorn Health Centre in Oban, who in November was presented with the Nurse of the Year award at the Scottish Health Awards ceremony.

Gavin Hookway, senior quality improvement lead, won the ‘Quality Champion of the Year’ category and the Highland Family Nurse Partnership team won the ‘Services to Women and Children’ award.

Among the other award successes this year was that of Campbeltown-based Fiona Semple, who was named Semple, who was named beltown year was that of Camp- award successes this year in 2015/16, the SPSP approach adopted through the acute adult programme was spread to all 25 hospitals in Highland, having previously been focused on the board’s four main acute hospitals: Belford, Caithness General, Lorn and Islands and Raigmore.

A KEY part of the Highland Quality Approach is the Scottish Patient Safety Programme (SPSP), which is focused on acute adult care, mental health, primary care and maternity, paediatrics and neonatal.

In 2015/16, the SPSP approach working on the testing of innovative ways to deliver healthcare in some of the board’s more remote and rural areas, which are particularly prone to recruitment difficulties, under the Scottish Government’s ‘Being Here’ programme.

On 1st August this year, NHS Highland took over the Riverview Medical Practice in Wick, the practice having failed to attract replacement GPs.

And work has been continuing on the implementation of a safe and sustainable model for senior medical cover at Caithness General Hospital, again prompted by recruitment difficulties.

This has included having consultants work in Wick on rotation and the development of a team of rural practitioners.

THE past year has seen an administrative change in NHS Highland, with the merger of two of the board’s operational units, Raigmore and South and Mid, to create the Inner Moray Firth operational unit.

NHS HIGHLAND’S emphasis on improving the quality of the services it provides can be reflected in the board’s ongoing work to embed the Highland Quality Approach, the management system designed to deliver better health, care and value.

Staff have been given training on running improvement events, and rapid process improvement workshops have been taking place and were showing positive results.

In 2016/17, improvement work is being focused on three areas: outpatient, out-of-hours and adult health and social care services.

Considerable work has taken place throughout the year to address longstanding problems with the recruitment and retention of staff.

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UK Universal Health Visitor of the Year.

THE past year was a memorable one for Garry Coutts, who relinquished his position as chair of NHS Highland after three four-year terms.

He was succeeded on 1st April by David Alston, a long-standing member of the board and a leading member of The Highland Council.

In a message to staff on the eve of taking over, Mr Alston said the board’s number one priority would remain delivering the best possible care, with compassion.

THERE was a Highland welcome for one group of people this year: refugees from Syria.

A team from NHS Highland was at Glasgow Airport in December to welcome 15 Syrian families – 28 adults and 31 children – who were to be accommodated in Bute.

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Snapshots

THEY say a picture says a thousand words. Here’s a few stories from the past year, clockwise from top left to right...

- NHS Highland’s prosthetics team regularly go the extra mile to make life easier for people. A patient shows off an adjustment to his prosthetic made so that he could wear his Star Trek outfit.
- Primary school pupils converse with NHS Highland representatives at the launch of the board’s ‘Reach Out’ campaign.
- GP recruitment in remote and rural areas is a challenge, but commuting to work is hardly a chore for one doctor who serves the Small Isles.
- Last year saw the launch of ‘Meet the MacPhersons’, a local media campaign that took a family approach to tackling underage drinking.
- Research, development and innovation is increasingly important to NHS Highland. Here, a doctor gets a demonstration of ‘smart glasses’ that could be useful in a medical environment.
- A deal was announced which could see Belford Hospital in Fort William being replaced.
- A campaign was launched urging people — particularly the board’s staff — to be more active when at work.
- Through the local media, NHS Highland raised the profile of those staff members, such as the switchboard team at Caithness General Hospital, who work on Christmas Day.
- Work gets under way on the upgrade of Raigmore Hospital’s critical care services.
- Nurses don’t just work in wards—a point NHS Highland sought to get over on International Nurses Day in June when we focused on the nurses who work in a police station custody suite.