

EDITORIAL

'When a baby is so critically ill or so severely damaged that treatment is of questionable value, there are two processes going on: that of determining what should be done, and that of supporting parents through the decision making and the dying.'
(McHaffie)

As you read this, English law will have considered the case of Siamese twins Jodie and Mary; sharing one heart, both will die if left unseparated. If they are separated surgically, Mary will die, but Jodie's chances of survival will be enhanced. Their parents, devoutly Catholic, argue that matters should be left in God's hands; better to lose both babies than actively to kill one.

When does it become unethical to initiate or to continue a procedure which is technically possible? Behind this question lies a depth of human anguish, both professional and personal, which must be at its most acute where the lives of children and babies are concerned. Our first article examines the ways in which the chaplain can best support parents and health professionals through the chaos and agony of losing a child. What form can spiritual care take, under such circumstances?

The complexities of spiritual caring are illustrated on the one hand by Hazel McHaffie's finding that 'many parents are grateful when chaplains avoid reference to God', and on the other, by Tom Gordon's account of a daughter's prayer that her dying father might give his life to Jesus. Chameleon like, chaplains become practised at 'tuning in' to what a situation requires of us, yet at the same time we contrive to meet a diversity of human need without losing hold of our own spiritual integrity. John Banks makes a case for a like integrity in chaplains' discussions with colleagues on the meaning of spirituality and spiritual care, if what he calls a 'spurious mutuality' is to be avoided. Meanwhile, Dorothy Grosvenor shares with us her experience of and reflections upon the task of teaching spiritual care to nurses. The extent to which this is possible depends largely on how we define spiritual care in the first place.

However defined, the task of spiritual caring is carried out in the fast changing environment of health care, and must be re-thought in response to changing patterns. Brian Cowan describes how the balance between the amount of care delivered from inpatient beds and through ambulatory care has altered significantly, and will do so more in future. Thus 'the services should be redesigned around the patients'. The implication for chaplaincy is that the chaplain's traditional ward round must needs give way to another model, and this is the area which Chris Levi-son explores in his article on the same theme. He reminds us that although medical methods may be speeding up, patients still process events at a human pace, and that the chaplain's contribution might help to 'humanise' a system increasingly dedicated to efficiency and speed of throughput. A ministry of brief but significant encounters will demand every bit as much from the chaplain, in terms of listening, empathy, focussed presence and the search for a word in season, as a ministry exercised in a more traditional ward based setting.

From a recent multidisciplinary conference exploring Spirituality in Healthcare, Noel Brown, in his introduction to the ORERE SOURCE, offers insight into the challenges and developments for chaplaincy in the USA.

With these and other thought provoking contributions we offer you this edition of the Journal, in the hope that you are stimulated to reflect...and perhaps to respond. In our comment on 'Post Graduate Chaplaincy Study' we write,

'as chaplaincy develops we are moving into a world where appraisal, clinical supervision, and professional development are the norm'

But we are also reminded of Alastair Campbell's words

'I find the idea that pastoral care should be regarded as a professional activity both attractive and unacceptable.' (Campbell 1985)

What may be imperilled or lost, and what gained, in this new world of chaplaincy?

Reference: CAMPBELL A V (1985) Professionalism and Pastoral Care. Fortress Press. Philadelphia.