

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

**Chris Levison**

*Reflecting on the conference presentations, speeches and reports, the Healthcare Chaplaincy Training and Development Officer and Spiritual Care Co-ordinator for Scotland looks to the future.*

When the king in the old story brought the wise man into his presence in order to test him, he held a small bird hidden in his hands and asked "Is the bird alive or is it dead?" The wise man, seeing the trap ahead, replied, "The answer is in your hands".

### **Spiritual Care Policies**

In the coming year all Health Boards and all chaplains and chaplaincy teams will be involved in discussing and producing new Spiritual Care Policies for each area of Scotland. There will be principles of chaplaincy which apply the same wherever, and there will be local differences depending on demographic make up, faith communities variety and numerical strength, and the views and perceptions of patient groups, staff members, local Health Councils and other relevant and representative people. It is intended that this will be a fully consultative exercise and so the expressed spiritual needs and aspirations of communities will be put forward and included as far as possible.

### **The Challenge**

Whether this results in a dramatic change in the way spiritual care, religious care and chaplaincy are perceived and delivered is yet to be seen. Hopefully the transition will be smooth and seamless, building on a foundation of good practice already established and developing from there. Everyone will be challenged by this process and it will be good for us to be aware of that as the new policy formation gets under way.

**Health Board/Trust managers** will be invited to see that chaplaincy/spiritual/religious care is not only something done by religious people, ministers and priests who come into health care establishments to answer the needs of like minded religious people.

Such care will become the province of all and all will share the responsibility.

**Chaplains** will be challenged by the breadth of person centred care, not only in ecumenical and inter faith terms, but with those of no faith community allegiance who yet have questions, experiences and needs which demand spiritual care and the skilled use of language, listening and silence.

**The faith communities** from which chaplains, lay or ordained will come, will be challenged to see the particular nature of the work and to not only allow but encourage the freedom which is necessary to provide proper patient centred care.

**Members of health care professions** will be encouraged to see chaplaincy and spiritual care as complementary to their work and chaplains and spiritual carers as full members of the health care team.

**The working conditions and relationships** within the Health Service will be indicative of a community which is able to exhibit that "mutual affection" which is the oil and the atmosphere in which spiritual care can take place.

**The diversity and inclusion of all staff at every level along with patients and their carers** will need to be taken as given in the thinking and planning for chaplaincy and spiritual care.

### **To Worry or Rejoice?**

Is it all too much to hope for? Is it pie in the sky? Does it threaten an old order which is not yet at ease with its own demise? Are we happy or nervous to see the state (The Scottish Executive) taking over even in part, a role and responsibility which has hitherto been largely within the hegemony of the church or the churches? Do our roots cry out a warning whether we cling to principles of Presbyterianism, Roman Catholicism, independent Humanism,

Islam, Judaism or whatever? Or should we, in fact, rejoice to see a significant area of our humanity, namely our spirituality, acknowledged as a part of every person? I rather think we should. Of course we will not always get it right and there will be difficulties of understanding along the way. The multitudinous ways in which people understand spirituality will inevitably lead to misunderstandings and differences. And yet the principles which lie behind this new movement, such as an appreciation of difference, are fundamentally unifying and reconciling.

The movements of society, the rapid change from industrial to modern to post modern and the increas-

ingly varied expressions within as well as among religions, are difficult to grasp. The response requires to be adaptable and non dogmatic. Chaplains and spiritual care providers will require adequate training, pastoral support and supervision to enable them to fulfil the emotionally demanding and costly nature of their work. Change is never easy and there are many issues needing to be grasped. The success or failure, and it will never be entirely one or the other, of this whole venture, truly "is in our hands".

*Chris Levison, Healthcare Chaplaincy Training and Development Officer and Spiritual Care Co-ordinator for Scotland.*