

EDITORIAL

In the 1999 Pulitzer Prize-winning play, 'Wit' by Margaret Edson, there is a scene where a group of junior doctors crowd round the patient's bed and compete with one another in order to appear to be the most intelligent in front of their professor. Petty rivalries, hierarchies and point-scoring come to the fore, while the patient lies between them, the battleground for their confrontation.

The scene is useful, in a negative way, in illustrating the effect of competition within healthcare on the care of the individual. The lure of competition is pernicious in our healthcare environments. Resources are limited, budgets are tight and at times it seems that the institutions within which we work are designed to set up and perpetuate a sense of conflict rather than a spirit of cooperation.

I often contrast my first week in parish ministry with my first week in Hospital Chaplaincy. When I was inducted to my first parish just over twenty years ago, I received a call from a neighbouring minister in the town. He had telephoned me in order to wish me well, 'but not that well!' I was a bit taken aback and asked what he meant. 'Well, let's face it', he said, 'We have two charges in the same town and if you do well, I'll be doing badly.'

There was no sense here of being on the same team. There was no sense here of it not mattering who scored the goal as long as the ball went into the back of the net. We were on opposing teams, competing against each other and the prize was the individual who chose to attend one church as opposed to the other.

My first week in Hospital Chaplaincy could not have been more different. Each day, I received a call from various chaplains around the country offering help and support through the initial settling in period. In addition to this, I was aware that I was, part of a spiritual care department and that I had colleagues in my own area of work, whose experience and encouragement was invaluable. Over and above this, I was aware that I was part of a wider healthcare team and was expected to contribute my own area of expertise to the care of the patients, their relatives and members of staff.

This edition of the Journal deals largely with the theme of cooperative, multidisciplinary working. It features a brace of articles by Eleanor Williams, examining the challenge of spiritual care to doctors and making the case for even greater cooperation between chaplains and medical staff in the delivery of effective spiritual care. These articles are followed by an illustration of such multidisciplinary working in the form of a case study. This raises important questions of sharing with other healthcare workers in the care of a patient, effective involvement of different areas of a care team and, also, the possibilities for change in the latter stages of a patient's life. The final article from Australia looks at inter-faith working in chaplaincy and raises important questions once again about our attitudes to cooperation or competition, this time between our differing faith perspectives and life stances. How do we meet the spiritual needs of those whose faith of life stance is quite different to our own?

If we are serious about 'person-centred spiritual care' then there are various challenges wrapped up in that very concept. The first challenge is simply to care for the person; to have at heart the individual's best interests.

The second challenge to us contained in that phrase is to place the needs of the individual centrally. In doing this, our own personal agendas are transcended and the barriers, that often have us in opposing teams outside the healthcare environment, are removed by the over-riding needs of the individual.

The theme is working together, cooperation across the barriers of profession, discipline, belief or faith. The challenge is to dismantle these barriers that insidiously suggest that we are in opposing teams. The result is, hopefully, an individual who, far from being the battle-ground over which our petty rivalries, hierarchies and intra or interdepartmental conflicts are fought out, actually becomes a gift to us, the one who helps us focus on what really matters, the one who helps us achieve genuine multidisciplinary working.

Reference

EDSON, M., 1999 *Wit: a Play* Faber and Faber, London