

24 HOURS IN THE CHAPLAINCY

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Abstract: As a means of establishing hard data on the usage of Chaplaincy real-estate in a large Acute Hospital, a 24-hour observation was carried out by an anonymous observer, in the Chapel, administration and Prayer-Room areas. An uninterpreted record of events was produced, which is summarised, and which gives an adequate basis for organisational debate and change. The limitations of the survey are outlined, and the scope for future surveys identified.

Key Words: Survey, prayer, staff, patients, solitude, support

Introduction

What might be going on in a Hospital Chapel at 3.30am that a Chaplain might wish to know about? Come to that, would the fact that nothing whatever occurs in the Chaplaincy real-estate for 28% of the time also be of interest to that same Chaplain? Ignorance is not always bliss.

Any organisation, irrespective of its purpose, needs to examine itself periodically, if it is not to drift silently first into complacency, and then into irrelevance. The Department of Pastoral and Spiritual Care at Derriford Hospital in Plymouth decided to undertake a 24-hour survey of the usage of its worship spaces and other rooms, enabling it to have hard data on which to base future planning, at a modest cost in time and effort.

The aim of the Department is declared in these terms:

“The Department of Pastoral and Spiritual Care, Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust, exists to provide pastoral, spiritual and religious support to all users and providers in the Trust, fully, equally and individually, without regard to their personal spiritual or religious positions.

It exists as much for those who would claim no religious standpoint whatever, as for those who claim allegiance to a religious faith or spiritual position.

It does not evangelise, it serves, with vigour, imagination and empathy. It is a home for all in personal, emotional and spiritual need.”

The Survey was intended to go some way towards determining if this is in fact the case.

The shape of the Survey

The survey consisted of an anonymously-observed 24 hour weekday period, in 2 locations; the Main Chapel, and the Multi-faith Prayer Room and Offices. A weekday was chosen, as being the most frequent pattern: the Office survey was held on a Friday, and so included Muslim Jumah Prayer.

The 24 hours ran from 0800 to 0800 the following morning, allowing both the working day and the night hours to be observed at a stretch, without interruption. The observer was the writer, dressed informally, and seated inconspicuously. It was resolved that if he was greeted by someone known to him, he would greet them, explain his function, and refer the enquirer onward to another member of the Department. In this way the corruption of the results by the “exposure” of the observer would be minimised.

This worked well, with the exception of a conversation with one individual who entirely ignored the explanation and engaged in a 20 minute consultation! Other than this, and the observer alerting an-

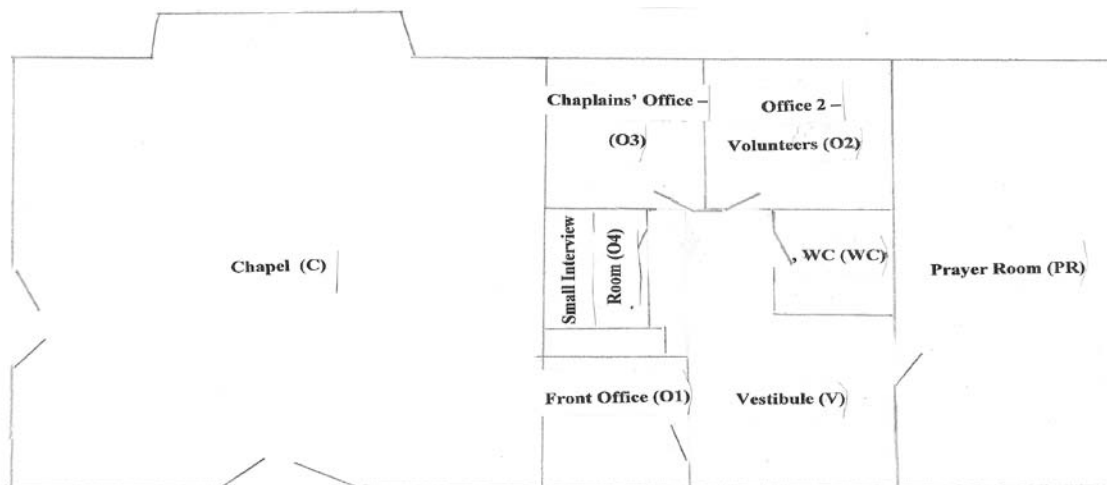
other Chaplain to a particularly distressed person in the Chapel, intrusion into the scene was negligible.

The observer endeavoured throughout to notice everything, however trivial, or however ordinary it may seem to someone familiar with the locale, following Becker's strictures about the difficulties of achieving a neutral viewpoint, without the observer's experience obstructing matters. (Becker 1971).

Interpretation of the data at the time of collection was minimised (vide Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p3), and left unstructured: events were simply noted, with comment only where it made a particular event distinctive.

In carrying out the Chapel survey, 97 events were observed in the period: in the offices survey, 110 events occurred.

Chapel, Offices and Multi-Faith Room Layout



Chapel survey

Grouped into types of event, the following events were observed:

Individual staff prayer	14 occurrences
Staff supporting patients	3
Cleaning and Maintenance	5
Corporate Worship	1
Books of Baby Remembrance	6
Prayer-Net	6
Place of solitude	20
Non-staff prayer	4

Votive lights	5
Counselling location	3
Lunch location	1
Reading of scripture	5
Reading of other material	5
Individual sleeping	1

This simple overview of the Chapel activities shows the most numerous users of the space are people using the space for solitary contemplation (20), and single members of staff entering for private prayer (15 incidents, plus one other incident, where a Staff Member entered, stood silently at the rear of the Chapel regarding the altar, and then left

decisively), perhaps involving a display of respect for the Reserved Sacrament: times spent in the Chapel varied from 3 to 29 minutes, so not all were swift and transient. The latest example of this behaviour was at 2110, and the earliest at 0105.

Other significant groups include couples (3 incidents, 2 involving young couples and the Books of Baby Remembrance, and one elderly and distressed couple), family members or patients singly or in couples (5 incidents), who tended to spend longer times in the Chapel, and a gentleman who spent a number of hours during the night hours hunched up in semi-sleep.

Offices & Multi-Faith Room survey

Grouped into types of event, the following events were observed:

Administration	30 occurrences
Pastoral encounters	21
Casual Visitors	12
Prayer-Room users	18
Intra-team communications	23
Requests for information	3
Planning Exhibition	1

This snapshot of the Offices and Prayer-Room shows different patterns: the routine by-play of Department Volunteers and staff: the administrative work of the front office: the movements of Chaplains and Volunteers between offices and wards: the carrying-out of Muslim Jumah prayers. To this might be added the use of the Department's WC and kitchen facilities by all sections of the hospital community.

One feature is one of inactivity: the office area was empty from 1847 through to 0827 the following morning, including the prayer-room.

Limitations of the Method

Given more time, (and a week seemed to be the natural period), an "averaging" of event frequency

would be possible. Given that several days of the week carry religious significance, no day is ever going to be the same as another: experience suggests that the same types of events occur throughout, but in differing proportions day by day. Only a fuller study would give evidence for this contention.

This particular study is an external one, in the sense that many of the participants, particularly in the Chapel, were silent: though one could observe their actions, their motivations and the subject-matter of their thinking, remain obscured. No interviewing or questionnaires were involved, as both would be intrusive, and require ethical approval.

The other limitation is the "stage" on which the scene is set: people enter and exit, and though informed theories about events before and after are possible, it is only surmise. The Chaplain departs purposefully: but no reason is determinable here. He or she sits before the computer but the purpose of this is not established in this research.

When given these limitations, the focus of the study changes. It becomes perhaps an investigation of the quality and quantity of the usefulness of the Chapel, the multi-faith Prayer Room, the interview and volunteer rooms; the ways that the general hospital population regards the Department and physically connects with it.

Survey Conclusions

In the survey period there was little visitation to the administration space by those seeking counselling, in contrast to the significant numbers visiting the Chapel next door. The offices bear appropriate signage ("The Department of Pastoral and Spiritual Care"), but the appearance is one of administration, rather than devotion or ministry. Indeed, during the period the space was as much used as a WC facility and Information Post as it was for devotional enquiry or spiritual counsel.

The data concerning Jumah Prayer are enlightening. The total number of worshippers during the main gathering was 26, of whom 2 were youths. Around 10 of these were not hospital staff.

Perhaps a member of the Chaplaincy team might be gainfully employed in the Chapel, ostensibly carry-

ing out administrative duties, but also available sensitively to approach those in distress.

However, organisationally there was little sense of the Chapel being connected to the offices or people next door, and no easy way of discovering that they were there. 2 people looked briefly at the literature in the Chapel, which is predominantly supportive of those in distress: it might have been of assistance to be directed to the offices in case of need. A direct door from one to the other might assist all parties concerned.

Although provision of Christian scriptures is made, it is not user-friendly: Testaments are not available in large numbers, and the lectern Bible is randomly open. Both might be employed more meaningfully, focussed on bringing support to the casual visitor.

The office area was unused after the departure of the resident Chaplain at 1847. In the observed period no Chaplain was called-in during the night hours, or at least needed to visit the offices when doing so.

No-one used the Prayer-Room either: could more use by others be made of the Department's office-spaces: is community involvement possible?

The next Survey

This survey is only a beginning: it displays a wide range of usage, with indications of development imperatives to meet that need more systematically and fully: a study which permitted interviews and questionnaires would be even more revealing and hopefully productive. This will now be considered.

References

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