

# Soundings

## Becoming part of the national conversation

**A**nne is a lady in her 70s who is recovering from extensive surgery as a result of a malignancy. In the course of conversation the other day she said to me, "You know how you have wedding rehearsals?" I nodded, wondering what was coming next as the talk had been nothing to do with nuptials. "Do you not think," she continued, "that we ought to have funeral rehearsals too?"

It was a very pertinent statement to make, not only about her own particular situation, but in a general sense too. Anne wasn't talking about having a living wake where you

have perhaps just an unusual excuse for a party. She was actually expressing in very concrete terms the essence of the Living and Dying Well strategy which is very much on our agenda as chaplains.

The difficulty is, of course, that it's easy to prepare for something that you are looking forward to and we know that many weddings are planned with military precision with nothing left to chance. By contrast think of how much time we spend planning for our own death. We don't know when but we do know it's coming. Like many people I've made a will but I haven't thought much beyond the material aspects which that legal document provides for.

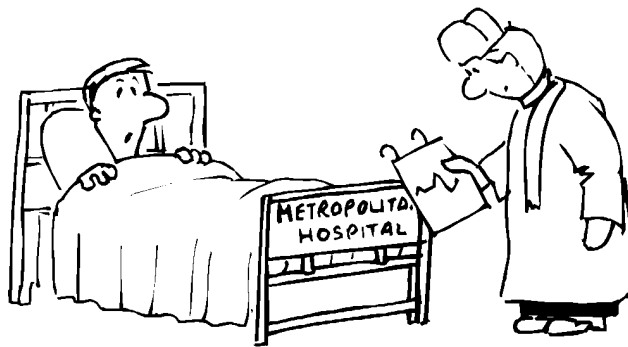
If death has become the preserve of the

professional: the doctor, the solicitor; the funeral director; the insurance company, what does that say about the way we view this most natural of all phenomena?

I know I'm on shaky ground when I start to think about how chaplains might be part of the national conversation about death and dying which is envisaged by the Living and Dying Well authors.

Shaky, because people already have a

kind of notion what we're about. A visit to a palliative care bed or a patient in intensive care might elicit the response, "I'm not that bad, am I?" How do we shift the perceptions people have of what we offer, to things that are more solid and positive while



'It's OK I don't need to see you yet'

retaining the right to explore, where appropriate, matters of life and death?

I don't have any answers but I know this: we won't get anywhere by remaining silent about it. Has your CHP got a local Living and Dying Well steering group? Is there a local action plan? Do you feel empowered enough to muscle in on these things? Because you should.

Take a leaf out of Anne's book. Sign up for funeral rehearsals and see what happens. And then share what you've learned with us all. We're all dying to find out.

A very merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all

**Derek Brown**  
President of SACH

## Notes from the last Executive Meeting

Held in Dunblane on 8 December

### Annual General Meeting

It was agreed that the holding of the AGM during the conference at the Beardmore Hotel had again proved successful, with 31 members present. It was hoped the format would be repeated next year. Following discussion at the AGM about the role of SACH in supporting its members, it was agreed to ask Fred Coutts to set up an online chat room in order that members might have a networking facility. SACH will meet any costs incurred.

### European Network of Healthcare Chaplains

The next consultation of the European Network of Health Care Chaplains will take place in London from 16-19 September 2010.

### Living and Dying Well

After discussion, noting the absence of the mention of Spiritual Care delivery, it was agreed that the secretary would circulate a statement in response to the Short Life Working Group paper sent to SACH for comment. (See page 3)

### Committee Reports

#### Chaplaincy Training and Development Advisory Group (CTAG)

Andy Graham reported the following points from the meeting in October

- a) ideas for training – perhaps a day on business planning
- b) Mental Health chaplains study day – perhaps held every 2 years – content of the day requires revision
- c) despite budget cuts it was felt important to retain the residential conference for all chaplains for networking and support reasons
- d) conference for newly appointed chaplains not very well attended perhaps revision of format required here also
- e) importance of national audit highlighted for purposes of informing management and government
- f) usefulness of longer conference for co-ordinating chaplains

#### Spiritual Care Development Committee

Derek Brown reported on the meeting in October

- a) Group working on compiling liturgy for all faith communities has almost completed its task
- b) The Humanist representative presented a paper on pastoral care and the role of the

chaplain – discussion followed about the role of generic chaplains

#### UK Board of healthcare Chaplaincy

Derek Brown reported -

- a) The role of UKBHC in providing a panel of advisors for selection purposes must be relinquished as a regulatory body cannot work in this capacity – advisors must now be sought from the professional bodies such as SACH. Insurance would be required for this as held by CHCC. HR reps on Health Boards across Scotland must be made aware of the need for advisors to sit on panels.
- b) As the situation in England is not progressing it may be that Scottish chaplaincy will attempt to move alone to registration as a healthcare profession. Should an approach be made to the Scottish Government, SACH may be involved in deliberations.

#### Role of SACH

Following the above committee reports and the perceived reduction in financial resources for NHS Education Scotland (NES), it is possible SACH may need to develop a support network not only online but by providing again a spring meeting. This situation to be monitored.

#### Data Protection

Anne Mulligan reported that discussion with the Data Protection Officer in Lothian had brought to light the possibility that the confidentiality clause in the Code of Conduct may act as a barrier to chaplains working in a multidisciplinary team. This should be a point for the UK Board to note.

#### Denominational Support

It was noted that for the past 2 years the Baptist Church has sought to support chaplains of all kinds by holding an annual meeting. The Church of Scotland and the Elim Church have also run similar retreats. Chaplains belonging to other denominations however, have not been able to access such support

#### Journal

Ian Stirling, chaplain at the Ayrshire Hospice will replace Iain Macritchie as joint editor of the SACH Journal.

## A Sacred Place



**T**here is a dent in the plaster wall of our family support room in the ER. It's just a little spot, hardly noticeable with the wallpaper over it. Others pass by oblivious to this small impression in the wall! It seems strangely out of place in an otherwise warm setting of comfortable couches and chairs. I have become friends with that spot, noting its presence each time I enter the room with a family. It is a sacred place, as sacred as a Chapel.

I have spent many hours in this room over the years with families as they await the outcome of a code or the treatment of a loved one following a trauma. The room is familiar to me but alien to the people I meet there. In this place, people begin the journey of altered life. "We did everything we could, but we were unable to save your

husband. I'm sorry". We watch carefully as people absorb the message. "It can't be true... Oh, my God!" We offer support, feeling terribly helpless under the weight of so great a burden. Our tools are hugs and tissues, touches of the hand, prayer, and caring, but seemingly inadequate words. "You'll be in our thoughts". We watch as the news becomes real, and creeps slowly from head to heart, from denial to awareness. We only get to probe the perimeter of the cavern death creates and the pain it causes. We escort the bereaved to their cars, wondering how people will go on, trusting only that God will, with time, heal the hearts and renew the shattered lives.

One man, several years ago, punched that wall after he was told his baby died from SIDS. It was a spontaneous act of anger and frustration, a true reflection of the moment we all felt. The pain in his hand was of little consequence compared to the agony of his heart. He left an imprint I have come to revere. It became a symbolic intersection of the vertical and the horizontal, the central point at which the eternal crossed

the temporal; the locus where hope and dreams were crushed by reality and innocence was overwhelmed by experience. It was a place where easy answers compressed under the weight of complex questions disintegrated. It became an icon along the side of life's highway.

For a while that was all it meant. But as time has passed, it has evolved to mean something else, the barren ground into which seeds for hope in the future were sown. People whom I once met in crisis have returned to say, "You were with me in that little room in the ER when my husband died. I never thought I'd make it but I'm doing better now. Thank you for being with me through the worst day of my life".

In a hospital, devoid of most sacred symbols, I have found a most inclusive symbol, one that should have a plaque beneath it which says, "This spot is dedicated to all people who met there tomorrows in this room".

### George Burn

(Retired Director of Pastoral Care at Mount Nittany Medical Center in State College, Pennsylvania)  
1999

## Response to Living and Dying Well Consultation document

**T**he Scottish Association of Chaplains in Healthcare would like to comment on the fact that there is no mention of Spiritual Care in this document. More requires to be said about the existential questions patients may have and how these might be addressed.

While acknowledging the importance of educating the general public with a view to engendering a greater degree of comfort when conversing on

matters concerning death and dying, the Scottish Association of Chaplains in Healthcare would prefer the short life working group to have acknowledged also the present input to this area of work by NHS Spiritual Care departments whose members facilitate appropriate conversation with patients, carers and staff on a professional full-time basis. This is an undervalued and often misunderstood resource whose input to health and well-being requires greater mention.

### Sing-a-long

Anne MacDonald from Glasgow wonders if anyone knows of any good sing-a-long CDs for worship. Contact her by e-mail: [Anne.MacDonald2@ggc.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:Anne.MacDonald2@ggc.scot.nhs.uk)

## Church of Scotland reviews chaplaincy arrangements

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in May 2009 instructed its Ministries Council to undertake a review of chaplaincy arrangements and report to the General Assembly in 2010.

Whilst the Church now only has a limited responsibility, in some NHS Boards, for the appointment of sessional chaplains, it still maintains a close interest and commitment to the support and development of chaplains and the services they provide.

This review is in furtherance of this “policy of care” and in November 2009 a questionnaire was circulated to NHS Chief Executives, Church of Scotland Presbyteries and Church of Scotland personnel employed in

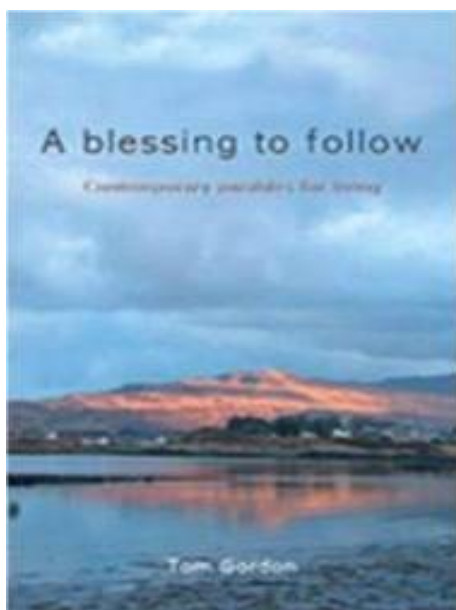
chaplaincy to obtain information and their views on the provision of chaplaincy and spiritual care services, the administration and responsibilities of local spiritual care committees and their relationships with presbyteries and chaplains.

Returns to the Ministries Council were requested no later than 31st December 2009.

In the New Year work will begin on compiling the report to be presented to the General Assembly in May which should inform the whole church with information and clarity about the culture and environment in which spiritual care, of which religious care is an important part, is delivered in today's NHS Scotland.

**John Thomson**  
Ministries Officer

## A Blessing to follow



### Contemporary parables for living

by Tom Gordon

Tom Gordon is a storyteller. He takes what is real and vivid, and creates stories of meaning and insight. This collection of original and contemporary parables – the first of a series of three – uses the framework of the Christian Year to offer a story for every week, and a few more besides.

As an observer of life, Tom also draws on his experiences in parish ministry and hospice chaplaincy to create a rich, creative resource for personal or public use. His stories will make you smile and shed a tear, allow you to ponder your own related experiences and take you into uncharted territory. But, along with his prayers and poems, they will always make you think, offering reflections on life and faith that will help you be aware of familiar things in a new and imaginative way.

Copies available on-line – [www.ionabooks.com](http://www.ionabooks.com) - or direct from Tom by e-mail at [revtgordon@btopenworld.com](mailto:revtgordon@btopenworld.com) or by phone 01875 812262.

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**The next edition of SACH Soundings will be published in March 2010.**

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