

NHS Grampian Spiritual Care Committee

Report on the work of Healthcare Chaplains in NHS Grampian 2017

Red Letter Days:

“A **red letter day** (sometimes [hyphenated](#) as **red-letter day** or called **scarlet day** in academia) is any day of special significance or opportunity. Its roots are in classical antiquity; for instance, important days are indicated in red in a calendar dating from the [Roman Republic](#) (509–27 BC). In medieval manuscripts, initial capitals and highlighted words (known as [rubrics](#)) were written in red ink. The practice was continued after the [invention of the printing press](#), including in Catholic liturgical books. Many calendars still indicate special dates and [holidays](#) in red instead of black”. (Wikipedia)

One of the features of the Chaplaincy service in NHS Grampian, which will be replicated in most other boards in Scotland, is that we are a service that operates 24/7, 365 days of the year, or 366 in a leap year. This is in large measure because of the On-call rota that operates in the evenings, weekends, and public holidays; anytime when Chaplains are not working their normal contracted hours.

I am very grateful for all that my Chaplaincy team do in hours and out of hours, day by day, week by week and month by month to respond to the spiritual needs of patients, relatives

and staff. One of the exhilarating and exciting features of working in a department like ours is that you literally do not know what any day will bring. However, there are also the more mundane, routine days, which the team respond to with diligence, sensitivity and good humour. It is also true that each year has its own predictable events, some of which happen on an annual, quarterly, bi-monthly or monthly basis.

However, each year brings some very special, significant days - “red letter” days if you like - that stand out from the ordinary. 2017 seemed to have more than its fair share of such days and so I thought I would focus on some of those “red letter” days as an outline for reporting on what our department has been doing this year (2017).

31st March:

This was Jim Simpson’s last working day in the Chaplaincy department, although not in NHS Grampian, as he remains with us as a Values Based Reflective Practice Facilitator. This was a red letter day in the department, not in any sense of celebration, as we were genuinely sorry to lose Jim, but rather because of its significance.

Jim joined the Chaplaincy team in 2007. Initially, that was on a half-time basis as part of a job-share arrangement with Muriel Knox, as Mental Health Lead Chaplain in Royal Cornhill Hospital. However, in 2008 his hours became full-time, as he added a half-time post in Aberdeen Royal Infirmary looking after Surgical and Maternity wards amongst others. In 2011, Jim went back to exclusively RCH Hours, but on a full time basis.

It was “noticeable” (to use a VBRP expression) that Jim very quickly moved from a half-time to whole time post and that is

indicative of the recognition of the skills he brought to chaplaincy and which were appreciated very quickly, a wealth of pastoral, counselling, caring skills that we have benefitted from over these past 10 years.

It was also noticeable how Jim moved seamlessly between the Acute and the Mental Health sectors (not an easy feat) but one he managed so well and probably the common theme in that was his great ability to get alongside and support staff members.

It was also noticeable how Jim embraced change, not only responding to it positively but also creatively seeking it out and also never getting frustrated when change took a little longer than he might have wished.

We are pleased that one of the team in RCH , Pam Adam , will be able to continue some of the VBRP groups that Jim had pioneered and developed there in recent years .

Jim's move out of Chaplaincy into the Acute sector triggered a number of other staff changes in the Chaplaincy Department later in the year. Gillian Douglas applied for the Mental Health Lead post that became vacant on Jim's departure and was successful in interview. She took up this post on 1st September. We are grateful to Gillian for her work as Lead in Woodend since January 2014 and wish her well in her new post. We also wish her well in the Masters in Healthcare Chaplaincy in Glasgow University that she is now studying for in connection with this post.

Gillian's move to Mental Health then created another vacancy in Woodend. This was filled by a service re-design in which Judith Pirie added Woodend to her existing post in Stonehaven, together with the addition of Inverurie Hospital.

A further service re-redesign followed with the decision not to recruit for Judith's former Assistant Chaplain's post, but from that post to give additional hours to Judith and Katrina Blackwood on the Foresterhill site. It does mean that Judith is the most peripatetic Chaplain in the NHS Grampian (outside Moray!) . We wish her well in her new post, involving four different sites. We also wish Katrina well in her extra hours, which in part is a recognition of the increasing activity around Community Chaplaincy Listening.

The developments listed above are part of a longer trend in recent years of reducing the number of Chaplaincy post holders by merging posts, while largely retaining the amount of Chaplaincy hours.

1st April:

This was a significant day for the department as it marked a major re-organisation of our secretarial/administrative service. Delaine Kennedy, who had been working with us part-time since October 2016, commenced full time hours. Jill Purves, who had been with us for four years, but had been on long term sick leave, decided it was time to leave us. We are grateful to Jill for her input to the department during her time with us, especially during the temporary decant to the Orange Zone.

This is the first time we have had one full-time secretary, but we are delighted to have Delaine's energy, efficiency and enthusiasm in her role and she has made a major contribution to the smooth working of the department.

25th April

This is the date on which our Community Chaplaincy Listening Service was delivered for the first time outside Aberdeen. Our latest group of CCL listeners received their training in February/March 2017. The training was led by our CCL Lead Katrina Blackwood. These were mainly volunteers, together with Ian Pallett, our colleague based in Dr Grays. Ian commenced the delivery of CCL in the Maryhill practice in Elgin on 25th April and we hope to sustain and expand the service in Moray in coming years.

The other first for CCL in 2017 is that we have now offered the service on the ARI site. Sue Rayner and Judith Pirie have pioneered this, using the Quiet Room beside the Chapel as a base for this. We are pleased to report there has been significant uptake of the service.

22nd August:

This was another red letter day, not just for Chaplaincy in NHS Grampian, but throughout the United Kingdom. This was the day that the United Kingdom Board of Healthcare Chaplaincy's (UKBHC) register was accredited by the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) under its Accredited Registers program.

The UKBHC maintains a voluntary professional register that demonstrates the accountability of healthcare chaplains to the public, promotes high standards of practice and behaviour and supports professional regulation. Chaplains registered with the Board will be entitled to refer to themselves as a "Board Registered Chaplain".

This has been a process that has taken a significant number of years and much hard work by the office bearers of the board to achieve. It certainly lays to rest any lingering notion that Healthcare Chaplains are not Healthcare Professionals. It is also a helpful tool when it comes to gaining appropriate access to information that allows Chaplains to do their work in an efficient and timely way.

Board Registered Chaplains need to demonstrate evidence that they meet the eligibility criteria for registration; compliance with the professional Code of Conduct of UKBHC and meet the requirements for Continuing Professional Development.

It is our hope that all Chaplains in NHS Grampian, certainly those band 6 and above, will be Board Registered Chaplains. This will mean that any future Chaplains employed by NHS Grampian will need to present with a Post Graduate Certificate in Healthcare Chaplaincy, or be willing to undertake it in the first two years of employment. One of our new colleagues, Ian Pallett, has commenced the Post Graduate Certificate and we wish him a successful completion of that.

On a personal note, I agreed to become the Registrar of the UKBHC in September this year, in succession to Dr Iain MacRitchie. I am deliberately not putting the date of that down as a “red letter” day, as although it gives me an insight into Healthcare Chaplaincy throughout the United Kingdom, it also involves me in extra work!

September 29th:

This was probably the red letter day par excellence in the department in 2017, the day that Her Majesty the Queen

officially opened the Robertson Family Roof Garden (or the *Therapeutic Roof Garden*). It was culmination of many, many hours of promotion, planning and fund-raising.

It was an opportunity for the wider organisation to recognise the enormous amount of time, energy and effort that one of our team, Rev James Falconer, had invested into the whole Project. This was underlined by the fact that James was the “host” who guided Her Majesty during her visit to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

It was an opportunity for us as a Department to significantly raise our profile, both as the originators of the whole project, in which we were greatly supported by our Executive Lead for NHS Grampian, Mrs Laura Gray, but also as the department which will manage and maintain the Roof Garden in the future. We were delighted to host in our Chapel the lunch to which many guests were invited after the opening.

It was also an opportunity for us to recognise and thank our many Aberdeen Royal Infirmary Volunteer Visitors for their many years of service, as they were invited to be introduced to Her Majesty and to the lunch afterwards. I know for many of them it was the highlight of the Volunteering experience and certainly a “red letter day “

Professor Nigel Dunnett, the designer of the garden, has stated: “It was a very special experience and a huge honour for the garden to be opened by The Queen. She remarked on the soothing sound of the water bubbling, and how important it was for patients to feel calm and relaxed, and she also pointed out that many of the plants she saw were ones that people would be familiar with, and that it would also allow people to feel at home in the garden . I’ve seen the evidence myself for how important the garden is to patients, families, carers and

staff, and how it is used throughout the day, every day. I've been told so many stories about how loved and how hugely beneficial this garden has become. Having it opened by The Queen was a very special occasion, and I hope it will highlight how gardens such as this need to be seen as essential elements in the therapeutic, healing and recovery process."

In order to highlight what a red letter day this was, for the very first time in my Annual report I am including some photographs:

Official opening of the Therapeutic Roof Garden



However there were some other red letter days in 2017:

2nd November:

This was the date of the Scottish Health awards in 2017. One of the members of our team, Donald Meston, was present to represent the Choose Life North East Scotland collaborative. This is a suicide prevention initiative and Donald's particular role in the collaborative is in facilitating an annual memorial service and tree planting for those who have lost loved ones through suicide.

The collaborative was nominated for two categories. The Innovation category was one of the most hotly contested and a difficult one for the judges to decide but in the end Choose Life North East Scotland were the deserving winners. The collaboration also took home the award for Care for Mental Health.

The collaboration between Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen City Council, NHS Grampian, Police Scotland, Cruse Bereavement Care and the Samaritans saw a 29 per cent reduction in suicides in a single year, with another 40 per cent reduction in the first three months of 2017.

24th November:

This was the first day that the newly extended and renovated Mosque on the Foresterhill site was used for Friday prayers. This has been a project that has taken a number of years to get the funding and planning permissions in place. The actual work started in the summer and during the final stage - from September to November when the existing Mosque could not be used for Friday Prayers - we were very pleased to host the

Foresterhill Muslim Community, both University and NHS, in the Chapel for Friday prayers. We were also delighted for them when they were able to return to their larger and fit for purpose premises. We are grateful to NHS endowments and Aberdeen University for financing this work and for the time that Laura Gray and Nigel Firth gave to this project.

1st December:

The final date for 2017 feels as if we have come full circle, as this was the final working day of Mairearad Ros. Mairearad leaves us to take up a Chaplaincy post with NHS Fife. She had been with us just under four years. We are grateful for her contribution to the department in terms of her work in the Green Zone, Roxburghe House and in support of our volunteers. We wish her well in her new role.

I hope these different “red letter” days capture a flavour of the activity of the Chaplaincy department in NHS Grampian during 2017 .

Mark Rodgers

Lead Chaplain and Head of Spiritual Care NHS Grampian

8th February 2018