

WHO SHOULD EMPLOY THE CHAPLAIN?

Abstract: The Church of Scotland is currently exploring the possibility that all Healthcare Chaplains should be directly employed by the NHS. This is in response to developments both within the NHS and within the Church itself. This article contains reflections upon this issue, from four different perspectives. We hear from the convenor of the relevant church sub-committee, from a whole time chaplain and head of department, from a part time chaplain, and from a parish priest who reflects some of the concerns of the Roman Catholic Church.

Keywords : healthcare chaplaincy; direct employment; spirituality;

Editorial Introduction

Georgina Nelson

On May 19th 2004, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland approved a proposal put forward by the Board of national Mission in these terms :-

'to grant permission to the Hospitals, Healthcare and Universities Sub-Committee to proceed with enquiries exploring the possibility of all Healthcare Chaplains being directly employed by NHS Trusts.'

This proposal has emerged from a background of recent developments within the NHS, notably NHS HDL(2002)76 and Agenda for Change – and of the reality of increasing financial constraints within the Church.

Is the time ripe for a change in the employment status of healthcare chaplains? This will affect all of us, whole time, part time, denominational, generic. It involves practical issues such as terms and condi-

tions of employment, salaries and pensions. It affects the way in which healthcare chaplains relate to, and are related to by, their own denominations. It concerns how we see ourselves, and how we are perceived, within the various healthcare settings in which we exercise our chaplaincy. Is it time to move on from the traditional arrangement without regret, building on the new enthusiasm for spiritual care within the NHS? Or, are there strengths and subtleties to the current system, which we would be sorry to depart from? Have we hitherto enjoyed the best, or the worst, of both worlds?

As the process of consultation runs its course, we include in this edition of the Journal four perspectives on change. We make no claim that they represent a full spectrum of opinion; there are, no doubt, a range of other views and responses to change which the editors would be happy to hear about.