

EDITORIAL

‘Total pain’ is a concept with which those of us who work in healthcare chaplaincy are only too familiar. The many facets of human suffering which we come across in the course of our daily work require us to draw deeply upon our own spiritual traditions and resources, in order to minister to those who suffer.

That ministry makes heavy demands upon us as persons, both in terms of the ability to look within ourselves with honesty, and the ability to reach out to others without fear or reserve. It also requires of us the thoughtfulness, faithfulness and loving insight which enables theology to bear fruit in relationships which are healing and sustaining.

Chris Sugden reminds us of the complexities of total pain, and of how it needs to be addressed by a multidisciplinary team, of which the chaplain is a part. George Beuken too speaks of suffering, and employs the riches of the Roman Catholic tradition in order to work towards a theological foundation for palliative care. The reality of total pain wove itself into the experience of Christ Himself, the same Christ whom the church makes present in suffering, in compassion and in healing power. Ken Coulter, in a timely and topical contribution, also writes of suffering; the suffering of the asylum seeker in our midst. He explores some of the theological resources of a past generation, in search of a creative response to those who suffer in the present.

What future directions might healthcare chaplaincy take? Four of our contributors address this subject in different ways. Chaplin and Mitchell report upon a plea made for education of healthcare professionals on the subject of spirituality and spiritual care, and in ways of ‘sharing the care’ through multiprofessional working. Kenneth Owens writes of a future in which the contributions, traditions and insights of Roman Catholic chaplains might be fully valued, as chaplaincy moves towards being ‘an inclusive inter-faith community’.

Fred Coutts expresses the hope that chaplaincy in future will find nourishment in a closer understanding of the many diverse traditions which exist Europe wide. (I am reminded of Ken Owens’ words about ‘a difference that enhances rather than separates’). And in her piece on chaplaincy volunteer visitors, Gillian Munro reminds us that the future will require us to make use of the wide variety of gifts of ministry which ordinary men and women of faith possess; chaplaincy will surely more and more become a shared enterprise.

This edition features several articles related to palliative care and hospice. We hope that those of you who work in another setting might feel able to write on the basis of your own experience and area of expertise. We are particularly interested in receiving contributions on the theme of spirituality and mental health problems., including Alzheimer’s disease.