President’s Letter, November 2020

Dear Friends

As we continue through this difficult time, my letter comes with thanks and appreciation for all that you are doing to maintain the high standard of spiritual care for patients, families and staff. As an executive, we are acutely aware of the stresses and strains people are working with, and offer our support to you wholeheartedly.

The pressures hospices find themselves facing are being well documented in the media, and I am sad to report that the fall-out of these pressures has already been the loss of seven chaplaincy posts around the country. Financial pressures have been given as the reason for the reduction of spiritual care provision, with the caveat that people will be supported by their faith communities if needed. I feel deeply saddened that underneath the financial argument is a deliberate misunderstanding and misrepresentation of spiritual care as purely a religious service. As we well know, this understanding of chaplaincy work disappeared a long time ago and our standards reflect the breadth of our intention to support people in spiritual need and distress. In several cases, I am aware that an explanation for the loss of chaplaincy has been, and I paraphrase, ‘If people want that kind of thing, local churches will provide it’. Of course, this applies to patient and families of all faiths whose places of worship are already committed to a high level of supporting their own communities. The other loss to patient care is the spiritual support to those who are not affiliated to a faith group, those who have no faith, and the majority of people we meet who have spiritual distress that is so unfamiliar and frightening.

In order to address this development, the executive have prepared a letter to send to hospice CEOs which gently but firmly reminds them of the responsibility to have a skilled, trained person heading up spiritual care, as you would for any other service. I’m holding back from sending it out just at the moment, and you will all receive the letter prior to it being sent.

In the meantime, we continue to work to the best of our ability within our organisations. There is some splendid work being done to support patients and families, but also the level of staff support is higher than ever. Our ability to work in this way, with our own vulnerability and anxiety, comes at a cost though, so I urge you to take care of yourselves and find things to sustain and support you. Please remember that our regional groups are a great means of sharing and supporting each other, and that the executive committee are more than happy to receive a call.

I hope to prepare a further letter before Christmas but wanted to share these developments in the meantime. Please let me know if your experience is similar or if you have concerns for your own position. We will support you.

Every good wish

Karen

November 17th, 2020