

Charitable Chaplaincy Cymru

Our hospital chaplaincy campaign is a great example of how our volunteers sometimes take the lead on certain campaigns. One such volunteer is Alan Rogers. Here, Alan explains his campaign for the charitable funding of hospital chaplaincy in Wales.

The campaign began in the autumn of 2008. The National Secular Society, having opposed state funding of hospital chaplaincy for some years, was attempting to calculate the cost to the UK National Health Service of hospital chaplaincy. I offered to collect this data for Wales using Freedom of Information Act requests. Because of the smaller scale of the Wales NHS and additionally because it had recently been reorganised, the collection of this data in Wales was much simpler than for the rest of the UK. This enabled me to collect, quite quickly, an accurate - all Wales figure for year 2007/8. I was shocked to find that it exceeded £1 million. About six months later I was able to collect the figure for 2008/9. This time the total exceeded £1.3 million.

Last financial year it reached £1.37 million. A total of over £3.8 million since I began collecting data. Because Health Services are devolved to the Wales Assembly Government this spend would have to be challenged within Wales.

Why was I shocked and angered by the discovery that more than one million pounds of NHS budget is spent each year on hospital chaplaincy?

Surely hospital chaplaincy is worthy work, helping people cope with the distress of serious illness, of terminal illness and of death.

Because it is a worthwhile activity it can be argued that it should be made available.

But being **worthwhile** is a **necessary** but not **sufficient** condition for NHS funding.

The service provided by Macmillan cancer care nurses, by the Wales Air Ambulance Service, by the Alzheimer's Trust are all worthwhile but they are funded by charity, **their** work is **not** funded by the NHS.

There will never be enough money in the NHS to enable it to reject charitable sources of funding. To test the validity of public funding one only need ask the question –

If there were no hospital chaplaincy service today and one were proposed would it be more appropriately set up as a charitably funded service or as a tax-payer funded service? Letters to and from the health minister for Wales, Edwina Hart soon revealed that no such case **has ever** nor indeed **could ever** be made.

I felt that some clear principles needed to be established to keep the campaign focused and to prevent opponents from diverting attention from the real issues.

If you would like a copy of the *Campaign Principles* please [contact the NSS](#).

In the Spring of 2009 I wrote to Edwina Hart asking if she would look into the matter and give some consideration to moving the funding of chaplaincy to a charitable trust. She responded with that old trick politicians use. She answered a different question (one that is easier to answer). She replied that hospital chaplains did a very important and worthwhile job. Persistent challenge (including a question in the Senedd) finally produced the **opinion** that funding from the NHS

budget "was the best way" to provide a chaplaincy service. No justification of this opinion was forthcoming nor was there an answer to the question – "Best for whom?"

I subsequently wrote up a simple stakeholder analysis which refutes this opinion of the minister. This is now part of the *Proposal* document. [If you would like a copy of the *Proposal Document* please [contact the NSS](#)

Our campaign has been brought to the attention of Trust Chief Executives twice, however, in Wales the Trust Chief Executives seem to have little discretion over the use of their budgets. They work under the firm control of the minister.

Approaches to the four main political parties in Wales have resulted in Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats in Wales deciding to discuss the charitable chaplaincy proposal at their manifesto meetings in preparation for the May elections.

Once again - this is a cross-party campaign, we need the support of every sympathetic AM we can find. In February 2011 the campaign obtained the distinction of being attacked by the British National Party in collaboration with the Christian Council of Britain at a meeting in Bridgend. They claimed that we wished to eject Christian chaplains from hospitals in Wales. Item one of the *Principles* reveals this to be a lie. Fortunately it seems - we will not get the support of the BNP.

In June 2010 I met the President of the Royal College of Nursing in Wales Tina Donnelly. I was given a fair hearing and a second meeting with the RCN took place in January 2011. At this meeting an Autumn seminar or conference was proposed – ideally to be held in the Senedd building. This would place the issue before the new Fourth Assembly. By that time there may be a new Health Minister for Wales.

Across Wales from Anglesey to Monmouthshire from Swansea to Wrexham we have supporters willing to write to AMs and CEs and to anyone else they can find to canvass. We need far more supporters like this. NHS cuts are imminent and the election for the Fourth Assembly is approaching - we have our best chance now to persuade people of the merit of our case.

To join the campaign you need only to [email the NSS](#) and your interest will be communicated to me.

This campaign is about **priorities**. The Wales NHS will never have such an excess of funds that it can afford to use over one million pounds per year on a service which can and should be funded by charity.