

ADVICE ON HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS

The role of the hospital chaplain, ordained or lay, is following in a rich tradition of the Church. For centuries, the Church has had a care and concern for the sick: many of the most respected people in the modern Church, such as Mother Teresa and Padre Pio were involved in caring for those who are ill. The pastoral role of the hospital chaplain involves the religious and spiritual care of those who are patients, but they are also concerned with supporting both the patients' families and hospital staff in what can be a difficult and distressing time.

Much has been written in both the Catholic and secular press about recent difficulties in healthcare chaplaincy nationally. However, Fr Chris Posluszny, Hallam Diocesan Healthcare Chaplaincy Co-ordinator, says, "In our Diocese, nearly every Hospital Trust gives the chaplains a full list of Catholic patients on a regular basis." He points out, however, that occasionally, particularly when a patient is admitted in an emergency, his or her religion may be wrongly recorded or omitted during the busyness of admission procedures. He advises that relatives should ask specifically for a chaplain to be called if they are worried.

If a patient has been in hospital for a few days without a chaplain's visit, the patient or a family member should ask a member of staff to request a visit from the Catholic Chaplain, or ring the Chaplaincy Office. You will usually be invited to leave an answer phone message as chaplains are frequently out and about in the hospital. If you leave the patient's name and ward, the chaplain will visit as soon as they can.

Because it usually takes at least 24 hours for patients' details to reach chaplains, Fr Chris advises that those who are coming into hospital for planned surgery and who would like to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, to ask their parish priest to celebrate it before they come into hospital. As most patients are only admitted the day before surgery, the chaplain may not know of the admission until after the patient has gone to theatre.

The hospital chaplain can be a great source of support when a hospital admission occurs. They can ensure that you receive the Sacraments, listen to the worries and concerns of both the patient and their family and pray with them. If a patient is to be discharged to residential care or convalescence, the chaplain can also, with the patient's consent, inform the parish priest in that area so that the patient may continue to receive pastoral care.