

4 January 2021

[Features](#)

Palliative plans?



It appears the Margaret Centre does not feature in plans for the new Whipps Cross Hospital. It provides specialist palliative care and cannot be lost, says Julie Donovan, a retired occupational therapist

The Margaret Centre grew from a need. You would have dying patients on the ward with just a curtain around them, family very upset, grieving, no support, nothing afterwards, lots of gaps. In 1987, the vision of the staff was realised and the Margaret Centre opened at Whipps.

I started there in 1988. I loved the work and I stayed for 27 years. We cared for our patients in the community, day care and in the in-patient beds on the unit. I would work with my patient in each setting. Being able to come in for a stay helped patients stay at home for longer. Planned respite admissions allowed a family a break if they had been struggling.

Many of our patients died at home. It was planned, with the services, equipment and everything that was needed. But some situations were too difficult and stressful.

Sometimes, from the diagnosis, the staff would suspect a difficult death. And that would have been discussed carefully with the patient and the family. We had the closest multidisciplinary team working I have ever seen in any service.

The Psychological Support Service on the unit offers not just bereavement counselling but support before the death to help a family prepare, including children who face losing a parent. Complementary therapy like aromatherapy or Indian head massage is available to patients and to relatives as well, to help a family member who may be very stressed or not sleeping. Again, quite unique.

There is a day room for relatives and a kitchen where you can make hot drinks and a microwave for snacks. It is very comforting; the process of making a warm drink is actually quite therapeutic. That adds to the whole family feeling of the unit.

The main purpose of my work as an occupational therapist was to maintain people's independence for as long as possible, allowing them to live while they were still alive. One man loved painting. We rigged up an easel over his bed. I made him brushes with grips, giving large handles, and I left him sitting up in bed painting.

Teaching techniques for conserving energy in the daily activities is a big area of work, showing family or carers how they can assist somebody comfortably, without hurting them – pain is a big issue.

New gardens completed in the last year were really well used over the summer. They were funded out of the charity for the Margaret Centre, which people donate to very regularly. In fact, the extension half of the building was funded by £1.17m raised by local people and charities. An added obligation to maintain the Margaret Centre.

To join the campaign or share views, email whipps.cross.campaign@gmail.com