Hospice friendly hospitals programme – Putting hospice principles into hospital practice

At the recent meeting of the National Steering Committee of the above programme, it was announced that 29 acute and 19 community hospitals countrywide are about to engage in an ambitious audit of the end-of-life services that are offered in their hospitals to dying patients and their families. This voluntary audit, which is the first of its kind in the European Union, will provide a detailed picture of the quality of end-of-life services in our hospitals. In addition to the audit, the HFH programme is also developing a comprehensive framework of standards around end-of-life care in hospitals – a move which is being supported by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) and the standards will be launched in June 2009.

As a member of the committee I had always hoped that this initiative to improve quality of life at end of life would also include residents in long-stay care settings. Findings to date highlight a wide range of issues impacting on the experiences of residents and families in long-term care settings. The majority of stakeholders interviewed are extremely keen to improve services. However, working within structures that are reactionary rather than anticipatory, compounded by the level of autonomy and control afforded to them, limits the likelihood of meaningful change. In order to address the aforementioned issues and ensure sustainable improvement there is a need for a system of strong leadership, management and governance. Only with commitment and support at strategic level can a project in end-of-life care in community hospitals and other residential settings ensure sustainable improvements.

Caring for Carer’s Ireland conference

I was invited by Mary McMahon, CEO of Caring for Carers Ireland, to address their 18th National Respite Weekend and conference in Killarney. The theme of the conference was – ‘The Family Carer – Sustaining Care in Challenging Times’, a topic we can all relate to.

More than 500 delegates attended and this included family carers of older people and people with disabilities and those in need of long-term care.

This was my first official engagement in my home town so I was delighted to be given the opportunity to share the Irish Nurses Organisation’s views on how primary care teams and specialist nurses and midwives can enhance and support the role of carers. There was huge disappointment and anger among the delegates that the Carer’s Strategy was not published as promised and I expect we will hear more from this group in the not too distant future.

Delegates echoed my sentiments when I asked them to consider what President Obama said, that “containing the spiralling costs of healthcare and expanding coverage to the 46 million Americans who currently don’t have it is part of the prescription for economic recovery.” Ireland, on the other hand, has decided to criminalise over 70’s who do not return their medical card. This does not make any sense in any civilised society.

Annie Smithson, RGN SCM, secretary, Irish Nurses Organisation 1929-1943

I recently received the following email regarding Ms Smithson:

“Hi my name is Mr Ryan, I am hoping someone, anyone, can help me in my quest to find out any information about Annie Smithson. Anyone who may have been a friend, acquaintance or hopefully maybe even a family relative would be wonderful. My father Michael Ryan was taken in by Ms Smithson when he was a young lad and spent some time living with her. If anyone can help it would be very much appreciated. I can be contacted through the president, Sheila Dickson.” – Mr A Ryan.

I have been intrigued by finding out more about our past secretary. One question posed by Mr Ryan was whether Miss Smithson adopted his father or simply took care of him for a few years. She kept in touch with his father for most of her life as she sent him a signed first edition of all her books. Unfortunately, most of them have been lost but he still has two in his possession. So any readers out there who have any information – I would love to hear more.

Forum on end of life in Ireland

I attended the above forum with Clare Treacy, director of administration and social policy recently. It was officially opened by the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese.

The Forum is a unique year long engagement with the public on end-of-life issues. It is engaging with all sectors of society to develop a vision of how Ireland can address the challenges of dying, death and bereavement. It operates by inviting submissions on end-of-life issues and through workshops and the Organisation has sent in a submission.

The Forum concludes at the end of 2009 and will be followed by a series of regional consultations. A final report will be available in April 2010. A National Coalition will then be established to advance the vision and action plan which will emerge from the Forum’s work.

More information can be found on www.endoflife.ie

Get in touch

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