

The Cost of Caring

Primary Care - The Hidden Transformation

For many of us a trip to our local surgery or a visit by the district nurse or health visitor seems much the same. But currently those working in primary care are probably going through the biggest changes anywhere in the NHS. New areas of need and a fast pace of change require strength and renewed vision.



New Needs

We are all aware of the pressure on GPs and nurses time. But the work in primary care is not just more of the same. New needs are emerging. They reflect our changing society and the opportunities for more vulnerable people to be cared for in our communities than before.

Asylum seekers and refugees have particular needs for which many primary healthcare professionals have no previous experience or skills. There are opportunities for churches to get involved as those providing health and

social care look for more community based support. One small church in Stockport now has a major ministry to refugees and works jointly with local services.

Young people are growing up in a world which often provides very little for their inner needs. More are experimenting with drugs, alcohol and sex, believing that the gains are high and the risks low. Despite the idol of sport, the overall health of our young people is probably poorer now than for several generations. Again this requires a different approach to healthcare and for many the needs only become evident when they reach crisis point.

More people with mental health needs and those with learning disabilities are being cared for in the community. The development of good support services and means of care has often not kept pace with this change.

Nationally, we are an ageing population. We are living longer and more of us want to be cared for at home. But



for many, families are divided and dispersed. The decline in the number of nursing homes and the pressure to discharge from hospital means that the burden falls on primary care.

Pray for:

- wisdom to know where to give care
- courage to embrace new areas and people groups
- better relations with other agencies especially social services, and with churches and other voluntary groups in meeting community needs

Fresh Challenges

All GP practices in England are now in primary care trusts. Often this means GP practices working together for the first time. It also brings GPs and community nurses together in the same organisation for the first time since the start of the NHS. This is a fantastic opportunity for the development of primary care, but one that feels like a bridge too far for many who are struggling with everyday pressures.

This opportunity for partnership working for the good of patients also extends to closer working with hospital and specialist colleagues and those in social services. For example, the

ability to redesign care pathways so that patients are in the centre rather than the services or the professionals. But it does require thinking and communicating in a different way.

GPs in England have also just voted to continue negotiations for a completely new contract, which will potentially change the way in which general practice operates in the coming years.

All of these changes are likely to affect the way in which primary care professionals work together and how they relate to patients and carers.

They also come at a time when the need to focus on what will improve the health of our population, rather than what will simply treat our sicknesses, is increasing. This means shifting the responsibility from the professional to the patient for his or her own health. This is quite a challenge when much of the media attention is on our rights as patients.

Pray for:

- Christian GPs and nurses to have the strength and courage to get involved in new partnership working
- wisdom for those leading primary care trusts to support positive change in primary care



Renewed Vision

Many in primary care are tired and weary and for a number cynicism has become their response to what is happening around them. Whilst primary care has an increasingly high profile, capacity does not appear to meet the demands for change.

Christians are not exempt from these pressures. For many, their original vision to be a GP or a nurse in primary care has become eroded and survival seems to be the constant theme. They are often those to whom others go when in need and may not have their own source of support.

Pray for:

- those in your church or group who work in primary care - that they would be encouraged and strengthened in their calling
- vision for Christians in primary care to be renewed
- courage to be salt and light in the surgery and community

Action Points

1. Find out who works in primary care in your congregation and pray for them - we usually look to them to meet our needs but they have their own!
2. Look at the needs in your community, whether with the elderly, those with mental health needs or learning disabilities and find ways of sharing the compassion and care of Christ with them in practical ways.
3. Pray for the needs of the young people in your community and be prepared to step out in meeting them, often in ways which goes beyond our comfort zone
4. Find out about the primary care trust that covers your area and pray for blessing on what it is trying to do for the population and for those leading it.



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