

YUNUS DUDHWALA SIZE 7.5

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Usually people only think about themselves as physical beings, but anyone who's been in hospital for twenty four hours, you have so much time to think about your life and where it's going, many, many people start thinking about their spirituality, and if they're religious then they might start thinking about their religion. You hear so many patients who say "Well you know that one week in hospital changed my life."

My name is the Imam Yunus Dudhwala and I'm the head of chaplaincy and bereavement services at Bath Health NHS trust, which is based in central London and East London. I manage a team of around fifteen chaplains, there are a couple of Muslim chaplains, there are a couple of Roman Catholic chaplains, there are four or five Church of England chaplains, and a Jewish chaplain. So the team comprises of different faiths, different denominations and it's across four different sites. So it's a challenge to manage the chaplaincy, but it's a very satisfying and rewarding challenge.

Across the sites there are Roman Catholic Masses four or five times a week in different hospitals, there are Church of England services and the Friday Muslim service on a Friday. Chaplains are usually on call 24/7. So this morning I've had a call from one of the patients, whose family member has delivered in the maternity department and they want me to come in to say some prayers, which is kind of a ritual within Islam, to say the call of prayer in the ear of the baby. Yesterday, unfortunately, we had a family who had a stillbirth, she delivered at about seven months, and one of the things that I do in the hospital is wash the baby for them, I shroud the baby, prepare the baby, so that they can...and then arrange the funeral for them, so that they can then take the baby to the cemetery and the funeral service can take place as soon as possible. So there's different things that we get called for, and I received a call, another call this morning, from another hospital which is part of our trust, where a young woman, she's got three or four children, I think, I went to see her a couple of weeks ago and she has deteriorated and she's very young and she's dying of cancer and she'd like to see me today, so I'm going to go to the hospital later on and see the family, see the children.

The day varies equally – it could be staff, it could be family, could be patients. It could be just a random person walking down the corridor, but it's about trying to care for them from a spiritual perspective, from a religious perspective, and a pastoral perspective. Anyone who doesn't have a faith, we will not approach them from a religious perspective, we will approach them from a human perspective, to make them feel much more positive about the experience that they are facing whilst they are in the hospital.

praying

It's an honour to be supporting somebody who's let us into their lives at this most critical moment of their lives. So absolutely it's a privilege. It's an honour, and you can't imagine the feeling that you have when you've supported someone, but it's not something that you take away and think, you know, I'm someone great. It's a humbling experience that, you know, this is how life is. Life is here today, gone tomorrow, and it helps you to reflect upon your own life, that, you know, what are you doing for humanity, what are you doing for people, and are you making the most of the time that you have in this world?

praying

There's been so many families who I have supported over the years, but a couple stick out, for example, there was a, a mother who was dying in the hospital and she had only one daughter and

they didn't have much family and the daughter asked me to support her and pray for her mother. So I went quite regularly and then, when she passed away, I ensured that all the paperwork was done, all the funeral arrangements were done.

I came into chaplaincy around eighteen, nineteen years ago. I started as a volunteer and then eventually the post of Head of Chaplaincy came up, it was advertised, for the first time ever in this country it was open to any faith, and we do have a large majority of Muslim community within this area, so I applied and I became the first person from a minority faith, from the Muslim faith, to become Head of Chaplaincy in the NHS, in February 2003, and I think it was pioneering, and I think it brought about a big change in perspective in terms of chaplaincy, and people were talking about it and rightly so, and I'm really proud that I was the first person who became the chaplaincy head from a minority faith. Some of the staff are very reliant on chaplaincy, especially when there's a traumatic event. So whenever there's a paediatric a&e emergency blue call and the a&e paediatric staff have to deal with a baby death, they definitely will call upon chaplaincy to support them. Because for them it just brings some calm in a very, very distressing situation.

If I go back eighteen, nineteen years ago, I think, as a young person who had come into this work from a seminary, and I think there's a lot of mistakes that, I think, I would have made at the time. I think I was very judgmental, but I think the experience in the hospital has helped me to realise that fault of mine. Secondly, I think it was very difficult at the beginning, to sit with someone you don't know, you're not experienced enough to know what to say, and you're always scared to say the wrong thing. But, as time goes on, you learn what to say, what not to say, when to say, how to say, and these are all skills that you develop as time goes on, and I think all my learning has been experiential. And it has helped me so much that now, lots of staff, whenever there's an emergency or a very difficult issue, they will call upon me and then they will just say "Now we don't have to worry".

Lots of people ask me that, "How do you cope?", because a lot of chaplains, they have supervision and they have time where they can reflect on their practice I don't have supervision and that's my own choice, but the reason is because I think I have a very good family, I have a strong family and I am able to forget everything, what happened in the hospital, when I go back home with the children, with the family, and that takes me away from the challenging work that I've done during the day.

In this hospital, because of the diversity that we have within our teams, what we have done is we have monthly team meetings, and, at the end of each meeting, we have decided that one of the faiths will talk about their faith, and something which others might not have known before. So the Jewish rabbi would mention about the Passover. I will mention about the Hajj and what it signifies, and the Roman Catholic priest might mention about the last rites and why it's important to the Roman Catholic tradition, so that way we're all learning about each other. We're talking with each other, next to each other, and I think that's extremely powerful.

So, in the hospital, I've received quite a few awards, chairman's awards and certificates for the chaplains department, but I think the best recognition came in 2010, when nationally I was voted the NHS employee of the year, that was amazing. That was out of the blue, but it just shows how people value the care which is provided by chaplaincy and chaplains across the country. When I was ten, I was thinking of becoming a reporter. Yes I was, I was going to become a journalist. When I was sixteen, I was thinking of become a lawyer or a barrister, and I think I still have some traits, inquisitive mind, but here I am in a hospital, I'm supporting patients and staff and families and I wouldn't change it for the world.