



SPIRITUALITY, FAITH, RELIGION AND MENTAL HEALTH

**(The views of 92 members of HUG on what we gain
(and lose) by having a faith**

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WHAT IS HUG?

HUG stands for the Highland Users Group, which is a network of people who use, or have used, mental health services in the Highlands.

At present, HUG has 349 members and 14 branches across the Highlands. HUG has been in existence now for 11 years.

HUG wants people with mental health problems to live without discrimination and to be equal partners in their communities. They should be respected for their diversity and who they are.

We should:

- ◆ Be proud of who we are
- ◆ Be valued
- ◆ Not be feared
- ◆ Live lives free from harassment
- ◆ Live the lives we choose
- ◆ Be accepted by friends and loved ones
- ◆ Not be ashamed of what we have experienced

We hope to achieve this by:

- ◆ Speaking out about the services we need and the lives we want to lead.
- ◆ Educating the public, professionals and young people about our lives and experiences.

Between them, members of HUG have experience of nearly all the mental health services in the Highlands.

HUG's aims are as follows:

- To be the voice of people in Highland who have experienced mental health problems.
- To promote the interests of people in Highland who use or have used mental health services.
- To eliminate stigma and discrimination against people with mental health problems.
- To promote equality of opportunity for people with mental health problems irrespective of creed, sexuality, gender, race or disability.
- To improve understanding about the lives of people with a mental health problem.
- To participate in the planning development and management of services for users at a local, Highland and national level.
- To identify gaps in services and to campaign to have them filled.
- To find ways of improving the lives, services and treatments of people with mental health problems.
- To share information and news on mental health issues among mental health service user groups and interested parties.
- To increase knowledge about resources, treatments and rights for users.
- To promote cooperation between agencies concerned with mental health.

INTRODUCTION

For some years now members of HUG have spent time talking about spirituality, religion and faith and how we incorporate it into our life and our understanding of our experience of mental ill health.

We have published a number of articles about the subject in our various newsletters. These have varied from the benefits we get from organised religion to seeing mental breakdown as less a sign of illness than a spiritual breakthrough.

Many of us feel that the spiritual aspect of our lives is closely connected to our overall mental health and yet that, at crucial points in our lives when our wellbeing is most at risk, this dimension can be overlooked, ignored or seen as destructive.

On the other hand some of us see the influence of organised religion as abusive and damaging at a time when we are at our most vulnerable.

With the growing debate around this subject we decided to devote a round of HUG meetings to the subject.

We held the meetings in August 2006 in our network of branches. In total 92 people participated. As usual we had an informal discussion amongst members guided by a few key discussion points. Notes were taken of these discussions which were then written up to create the following report which was in turn presented to our 'Round Table' for approval.

The great majority of us stated that we had some sort of belief - usually of a higher power or being that gave us some comfort. A substantial proportion of us are part of a Christian church community, varying from the Free Presbyterian Church to the Church of Scotland to the Catholic Church to Jehovah Witnesses and Evangelical Christian religions. Some of us take our personal beliefs from aspects of a number of different religions. Very few of us are part of a religion other than Christianity except for a tiny number of us who are Jewish or influenced by Hindu or Islamic beliefs. Some of us have no belief in a God but live by a strong humanistic moral framework, some of us have little interest in the subject, and a few of us are actively opposed to the idea of faith or religion.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Faith, spirituality and the comfort and community of faith groups plays a major role in the lives of many of us who have experience of mental illness. It provides meaning, purpose, a reason to live and a route to surviving the sadness and confusion of mental ill health.

For those of us who benefit from it, it can become the central part of our lives.

It can have disadvantages and some of us have suffered from the sometimes oppressive, discriminatory ideas that some faiths hold regarding people with a mental illness.

We feel that this area has been neglected by the people who work in the mental health field for too long and that the response to our own spirituality is dictated to a large extent by the personal views of those treating us. Some people believe that including people's religious beliefs is not appropriate in the treatment they provide, and others that a shared vision enhances our care. As with the workers, we have mixed views about this. It would be good to have a debate about the most ethical and appropriate ways of helping those of us with spiritual needs to have these met in the context of our treatment.

When we connect with our own faith communities we find that both communities and leaders can have a dismal lack of knowledge about the effect of mental illness on our faith and what mental ill health is in the first place. This can mean that religious leaders are sometimes ill placed to provide meaningful ministry to us and that some communities are inaccessible to our members. It would be good to build on the good practice of those that have made strong connections with us and to provide more education about our lives and what does and doesn't work for us.

The chaplaincy service in New Craigs Hospital is very much appreciated by our members and although the chaplain is of a Christian background the service has made vigorous efforts to reach out to people of other faiths and backgrounds. However this is not necessarily widely understood by all of our members.

THE HELP WE GET FROM FAITH

To describe the assistance that faith can offer is very daunting but it can vary from the basics that we all need, which is a sense of understanding and acceptance, to the fact that it gives us hope and comfort and meaning when we have little else left to rely on. It can provide strength and purpose and healing and ways out of negative and unhealthy lifestyles.

For some of us it provides a framework that keeps us going - it helps promote a sense of wellbeing which weaves a positive message into our lives. It is also a way of coming to terms with and accepting our experience.

The church itself can also be a place to meet people, to gain a social life and to find things to do which we enjoy and keep us occupied. It can be a community of support which some of us cannot find elsewhere; it is not only a source of friendship and support but a place where we can talk about some of the hardest things that we have gone through with the knowledge that our experiences will be accepted and not judged. It gives us something to identify with and believe in and in many ways it gives us forgiveness and acceptance of things that we struggle to accept ourselves.

However, to many of us faith transcends concepts of support and friendship and moves into areas beyond this where our belief feels like a miracle, where we can live through the darkest of times and feel sustained by a power greater than we can imagine. It is a source of comfort and succour where simple things like prayer, confession and belief bring light into our lives.

Many of us find a spiritual element to our lives which is hugely important to us and yet not a part of any organised religion or faith. This can be just as important to us in finding meaning and support compared to more formal expressions of faith.

For some of us the help we get from our faith has kept us going in the darkest and most frightening times:

"When I was a child I was abused and the only escape I had was by going to church. It is right for me - the power of prayer is incredible even when nothing else works."

It can also act as a source of deliverance when our lives have become unmanageable:

"My faith is good. It is so strong. I was on methadone and went to a Christian charity. The feeling of serenity was so good. It was the only place where I have sat with men who have killed - not talking about 'The Troubles' but learning from Christ's presence. It had a profound effect on them."

It can also be a place where we regain hope and strength:

"I had a breakdown, but then I saw space at the end of the tunnel. He is always really close to me. The breakdown opened me to spirituality. He never leaves my side and gives me extra strength when ill."

The religious leaders we see can be a huge source of support sometimes because they listen and sometimes because of simple gestures of companionship such as a hug or a cuddle. The same applies to the faith community and services where we feel amongst like minded people where we are able to be open and emotional yet in a safe and respectful space:

"The only one that really helped me was a Free Church minister – there were tears going down my face. He acknowledged me. I felt he really helped. He is like a friend and spiritual guide. My problems can be solved by God."

For many of us the fact that we have faith is the only reason that we have been able to carry on, living in the world of mental illness, suicide is a constant possibility for many of us, yet having faith in something can keep us alive. Not only that, it can enrich our lives and bring vibrancy back into harsh existences:

"Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary situation but faith can take you through it and can carry you when you are unable to go on. You will only understand when you have been there."

"I have faith in life and mankind and the planet and that people are good. I couldn't have carried on without it."

For some of us our connection with formal religion is tenuous but we do see some sort of purpose and this can be a great inspiration and provide a framework within our lives:

"We all have great power. I have survived so much that should have killed me. I believe that I was given the power to achieve something. I have faith that when the time is right I will be able to do what I must do. That is my touchstone for when it gets darkest – I have survived so much – there must be a reason for it."

"I find that science as opposed to religion opens the world up as a marvel to us."

For others our faith and prayer is a natural part of our lives and a part of our everyday existence. It is a wellspring that runs through everything and is as easy to accept as any other part of our lives:

"I have quite a deep faith; it has been of enormous help to me."

"I have always been very spiritual. I don't need a church or anything, I know the difference between good and bad, it's not about God and damnation, it's about love."

"I just have a strong spiritual faith which is not religion or attachment to a religion. It's up to me - it has helped me to choose to stay alive; it's helped me to understand me and to want to be me."

"I have a faith. It's always been there. It was just something I was brought up with. I've still got it, it provides confidence and wellbeing and belief in something good which helps you."

For some of us there are alternative ways of looking at religion or spirituality. We may have what are seen as slightly alternative beliefs such as in a mother goddess or Gaia or a wonder at the sense of spirituality that comes from an appreciation of nature and the world about us.

For some of us it is also about how we live and conduct ourselves; religions can provide a moral and ethical framework for how we behave and treat others which enhance our lives and provide a clear stable message about how we live amongst other people:

"Respect other people's feelings and don't judge them as different – God is behind all this."

"I do see a place for spirituality and see in the religions things we could all agree with such as; do not kill and the ten commandments. They can be great. I have a belief and that belief is in humanity; we have incredible power."

For some of us our faith is both a struggle and a salvation:

"My faith has grown. I was a Christian at an early age but I lost my faith after my niece died – there can't be a God if this happens – I hated God. I now realise I can't question him. I believe in evolution but that doesn't matter; I love God and have accepted Jesus Christ as my saviour. If I am right you don't die, you have eternity with God. Big mistake or not – if its nonsense then all I have left is that I lived a good life with respect for other people."

Finally for some of us faith is a source not only of comfort and support but of healing.

THE DISADVANTAGES OF RELIGION

Some of us, both believers and non-believers, did see that there can be disadvantages to religions -some, because we just don't believe in the concept and others of us for some of the following reasons:

For those of us that have no faith the absence of belief can cause a void in our lives:

"It would be nice to believe in God especially when you are not well but science says there is no evidence which is very bleak. If there was a purpose there would be a God."

Some of us believe that some religions give more status to men and subjugate women - especially the more fundamentalist Christian religions and others, such as the Islamic faith:

"The faith I was brought up in had very different choices for women and coloured my understanding of who I was, what I was capable of and what to expect."

We felt that many religions did not accept homosexuality and that this was damaging to the wellbeing of this community of people.

Some of us saw doctrines promoted by churches such as the Free Church as being too rigid, too strict and for some, oppressive.

Some of us worried that some churches are single minded and unwilling to look outside the confines of their community. We worried that they didn't see the need to love all things; rather, some members choose to condemn those who don't share their beliefs.

A few of us worried that the church has grown to look after itself rather than the individuals who are a part of it.

Others doubted that the church has sufficient awareness of the social problems we experience:

"I was bought up a Lutheran but when I saw church and its reaction to social problems I pulled out – I see it as 'churchianity' - sometimes peoples faith is seen as identical to the church, some churches are abusive to others."

Some of us see the established church as part of our cultural history and partly responsible for the horror of war and other miseries. We feel that its power has been used badly:

'I feel that religion has been responsible for the worst atrocities across the world - I cannot see this changing.'

Some of us were also very wary of some of the more fundamentalist religions and felt that they could be damaging. We felt that extremism was unhealthy both in faith and also in those with no faith:

"I have a faith but it is questionable if it helps. I was heavily involved with 'Born Again Christians' – it is debatable if it works when I am 'high' or 'down'... when I am high I go through really Christian phases, when I am not well I focus on the darker side and feel that I am being punished. I believe in God and the devil and when I am well I have quite a good balance but there are people who believe in healing or on the other hand that mental illness is caused by the devil. It puts pressure on you."

Some of us worried that young people born to accept faith without question would possibly grow up with limited powers to challenge and question and enquire about the world around them.

A number of us felt that creationist views of the origin of the world were evidence that some religions were based on a damaging lack of rationality which in turn damaged other religions that incorporate scientific progress into their views.

Some of us worried that religion could be too judgemental and some of us worried about the tensions between scientific, reasoned ways of thinking compared to the more intuitive aspects of faith. We worried that both ways of thinking have merits but that it was hard to make positive connections between the two ways of seeing life and the world.

THE DAMAGE THAT WE CAN FACE FROM THE CHURCH BECAUSE WE HAVE A MENTAL ILLNESS

As we have already said faith and the church can bring immense comfort to us but there is another side to it connected to our mental health which can be seen as deeply damaging.

We worry that some of the more extreme religions target us as people needing saved. This may happen at very vulnerable times in our lives when we do not have the strength to argue or make reasoned choices and when the vision they offer can be very attractive. This may feel very good for some of us but equally, for others, it is

very worrying. We feel that such activities can on occasion amount to abuse, manipulation or even brainwashing:

"For me, at my lowest it did help having a faith and it still helps but some of the more extreme sects can pick up on people who are low and manipulate them."

"If you are mentally ill you can be very vulnerable –some churches can target us specifically because we are vulnerable, almost as if what they do will help us more than the doctors. If we are ill we will grasp at anything."

Some religions, especially the more fundamentalist ones, see people with a mental illness as being possessed by devils or demons. A small number of us have been told that we are possessed or have witnessed friends being told this. Most of us feel that this is unhelpful in the extreme and it has certainly alienated some of us from churches that promote such views. However for some of us who are full members of such communities such explanations can seem more rational than scientific interpretations:

"I was told by the church that I was possessed by the devil. I was disgusted"

"You can take it literally from church texts which talk of mental illness as people being demonised or possessed. This can be a big problem when you are ill. You can stand and look at it too much and turn it into an obsession."

"The church can be against mental illness, they don't want to know or its something done in the past or demonic – I don't like this at all."

Sometimes we are led to believe that our illness has been caused by the sins that we have committed or by our inability to believe in the forgiveness of God. This can serve to reinforce our illness and to isolate us further from sources of support:

"It can make you worse by going to a heavy sermon, told it will lift your soul, but it depresses you and makes you feel worse – it can be about hell and damnation."

"Sometimes they say that you are ill because you don't have enough faith in salvation and this can be very dangerous."

"I've just started [a form of] meditation which is Hindu. I've never been exposed to this before. It's about positive thinking. There's no problem with this, it goes hand in hand with cognitive behavioural therapy and is helpful but when I got told that mental health is because of being bad in former lives it becomes a huge problem."

"Some faiths view mental illness as a sign of sin."

In the more conventional churches we sometimes feel a sense of hypocrisy. We worry that middle class values and ways of behaving are promoted that do not consider the different but equally valid lives we lead if we have a mental illness. We do worry that some congregations shrink away from those that are seen as odd or disturbed and find it hard to realise that we are all prone to distress and bizarre behaviour and that just because we are seen as 'odd' doesn't mean that we shouldn't have the same rights of others and that we may also crave acceptance and the succour of faith:

"I was bought up Church of England and found them intolerant of people with mental health problems and physical problems. They were unsupportive and pushed me away from the church totally."

We also worry that our illness can be provoked by our faith. We may be consumed by feelings of denial and guilt which only serve to reinforce our sadness. Or we may get very confused and become so consumed by faith that we make ourselves ill:

"There are many in the islands that ended up ill because of religion."

"I can't go to church because I feel judged and as if mental illness is the work of the devil and that we brought it on ourselves."

"Spirituality is a great concern - you can get hooked on it." It can be worse than mental illness. "

Sometimes our faith is in direct conflict with ways in which we might get better:

"When I decided to take medication [which was against my religion] my whole family turned against me. It was very hard but I had to take the decision myself. I wouldn't be here without the medication."

Many faiths see suicide as a terrible sin. This is a great problem for many of us as suicidal thoughts can be a daily feature of our lives.

Some of us just find faith too much to deal with; life is hard enough without having to face things that are difficult to deal with on top of getting through each day.

Sometimes we worry that mental illness is equated with all things negative:

"The portrayal of Judas Iscariot as someone who was mad and ill"

THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN FAITH AND ILLNESS

Almost all of us agreed that, when ill, our beliefs, indeed our whole lives, can become confused and the boundaries between what may be seen as a spiritual experience and what may be seen as an illness are hard to delineate. For example, when psychotic there may be clear signs of religious connections. We may feel that we hear the voices of spirits or we may believe that we are possessed or that we are the devil.

When we are depressed we may be consumed by feelings of guilt and sin from which we cannot escape.

Everything can become extremely distorted and complicated. It is rare that our beliefs are either all to do with illness or alternatively all to do with belief and the way we want these parts of our lives interpreted may vary from individual to individual.

In the previous section we mentioned the pain we may feel when faced with the churches ignorance of illness and yet for some of us that interpretation is more comforting than that provided by psychiatrists or other professionals:

"... with psychosis, it distorts the religious experience; you don't know if you're ill or religious – maybe illness helped me see a place where I couldn't be atheist."

"Like taking drugs, you can have experiences that seem real at the time. There is often a very allegorical meaning inspired by them. I don't need to take them literally but it is connected to a part of me that I actually believe. I feel you need a spiritual side to get across what is inside you."

"I get ill when I discuss religion."

We also thought that on occasion our very expression of faith can become so tangled up and obsessed that it falls into the realms of illness.

THE HELP WE GET FROM WORKERS IN MENTAL HEALTH

We had mixed reports on how our faith and illness has been dealt with and mixed views on how we wanted this aspect of our lives to be interpreted. Some of us found professionals had a clear understanding and yet some of us felt that there was no understanding and no attempt at understanding or even at listening:

"They don't recognise its relevance."

"It's a very personal thin. No one should hinder another person's faith, including psychiatrists."

"People treat my opinions as "she's sick, that's why she thinks that way."

"To me there is a problem because the medics see things in terms of the chemistry of the brain. If you are holding on to your faith it is not useful to have your ideas described as chemistry. This suits some but not lots. There can be strength in different approaches which would help. We need more sympathy as a given. Because they don't understand it they bedevil you with chemistry."

For some of us there should be a clear division between health-related assistance and our faith. Our faith (or lack of faith) is a private thing that shouldn't be included in the task of healing. The task is a medical one which requires objectivity. Yet for some of us our faith is integral to our self image and definition and only a holistic approach that takes into account mind, body and spirit can have any hope of helping us. There was also some worry that people from different backgrounds, cultures and faiths compared to our own faith or lack of it may struggle to understand our perspective:

"Dr X listens and never judges or pooh poohs religion. He never tries to influence me and never sees it as bad. He has been very good with my beliefs. The Community Psychiatric Nurse is also very good and doesn't say what her beliefs are but I know we have a lot in common."

"I find it beneficial if a consultant or counsellor has my faith and shares similar belief systems. Then we can communicate on a different level. Its not helpful if they don't want to talk about faith."

"We need to keep faith out of treatment. It can be very intimidating if you don't have the confidence to challenge it."

"Faith could be supportive for some people but it should not be pushed on to patients."

"I went to my GP about my spirituality but never at any time has he taken an interest in my faith and the way it affects my illness. Faith may stop you committing suicide."

"Psychiatrists don't quite know how to approach it – they are a bit afraid of putting their foot in it."

The sharing and appreciation of our experience may be fundamental to how we co-operate and join in with our treatment and the understanding of our perspective may be key to our recovery:

"I've only ever seen my experience as a spiritual crisis. Dr X has been with me all along with this. If my spirit is not calmed by psychiatrists then I may get ill. I don't follow any religion and take a leap of confidence from different faiths. It's people that ruin it through their interpretation. It's very important but we can be scared – what if we view it as illness or demonic. It's very difficult to get help with it. I can't take the risk of someone judging me or saying what I experience is illness."

The fact that some doctors take a very scientific approach to illness and view our faith perspective as illness can be very damaging. Equally the opposite can be the case – we can become consumed by our spiritual journey and it may turn into illness. To have this recognised can be helpful:

"My daughter died some time ago. She saw a doctor. She had great faith. He told her it wasn't religion it was illness. She wanted to pray and, when she was allowed to, she would pray for 2 hours a day under a tree."

"They used to see my attitudes and feelings about spirituality as signs of illness."

"When I first got ill I thought I would save the world - I thought I was the devil then Jesus. They took my bible off me. They said I wasn't capable of making decisions of a religious nature. In retrospect this was probably good."

"There is a conflict of approach combining the medical with the spiritual."

There is a feeling that the views of psychiatrists on this subject are as varied as our own and we have been told that there is a very good section on spirituality (entitled 'Spirituality and Mental Health') on the Royal College of Psychiatrists website. This can be accessed at www.rcpsych.ac.uk and typing in spirituality in the homepage search engine.

We did feel that there is a need to try to understand this aspect of our lives even if we are ill and our views perhaps distorted. There was also a feeling that some of our spiritual experiences, even if very warped by illness, may have a meaning to us and that this needs to be recognised.

THE HELP WE GET FROM FAITH COMMUNITIES WITH OUR MENTAL HEALTH

We have already described many of the ways faith and our faith communities help us.

There are additional ways that these communities help. For instance they can provide a haven of decency and ethical conduct and they can provide counsel and community and a safe place to be in:

"My pastor knows I have a mental illness - they accept me - he's fine with me."

They can also be a source of help and support with our illness. With some faith communities providing direct services to people with mental health problems these services can be very helpful, but we do wonder how accessible a service provided by a particular faith community would be to people of other faiths:

"A Community Psychiatric Nurse asked why I go to 'Roads to Recovery?' [run by the Free Church]. There's no violence, it's pure spirit, they pray for everyone, it's just quiet and peaceful. There are no answers. A lot of people have schizophrenia and it has really helped them. It also helps keep people free of drugs."

However many of us felt that, with some exceptions, some of the faith community leaders had little understanding of the experiences of those of us who go through mental illness. We felt that they had a need for mental health awareness training from the perspective of users and training in the facts and realities of illness itself. Hopefully this would lead to greater understanding, tolerance and the tools to deal with the world we take into our worship:

"Ministers often don't understand mental illness. Some are very good counsellors and others seem to have their own agenda and a lack of understanding. They can't understand unless they have been ill themselves."

"The minister has sympathy but doesn't understand."

"My delusions reach into heaven itself but my minister has allayed many of my fears."

"The ministers vary - some have a fantastic insight into mental health, others very little."

"A lot of people without training, including religious people, can be very frightened of mental illness even if they are sympathetic to us."

In the Highlands there is no easy access to some places of worship. For instance the nearest synagogue is well over a hundred miles from Inverness. This meant that one person has to rely on the goodwill of the Findhorn Foundation or the Catholic Church to use their sacred places for their own worship.

Some of us do find it hard to attend church. This can be for a number of reasons. We may find it hard to get out of the house - perhaps because we are agoraphobic or because organising a trip such as this is beyond our capabilities and too embarrassing to ask our neighbours to help us with.

It can also be because we cannot face crowds especially in places where we find ourselves vulnerable and emotionally exposed and where we doubt the understanding and acceptance of the congregation around us.

For many of us concentration is very hard and a service or reading from texts is beyond us.

Some of us find it hard to practice our faith for the simple reason that faith is often seen as suspect and it is easy to dismiss faith nowadays as an outmoded concept.

THE CHAPLAINCY AT NEW CRAIGS PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

The chaplaincy at New Craigs received almost unanimous praise from across the Highlands.

The chaplain is open and accessible to any patient in the hospital. He is easy to talk to and will listen to almost any problem people have and in no way restricts his assistance to issues of a spiritual nature or to people of any particular faith:

"You get a sense of comfort and speaking with the chaplain is very good."

"I find the chaplain in New Craigs very helpful."

"We sat down to talk, without talking about religion."

The spiritual room in the hospital also came in for praise as a being a calm peaceful place:

"My father died and I have no family. One of the comforts was to go to the chapel and be quiet and absorb the spirit."

However there were a number of problems. Perhaps, in reflection of the main faiths of the Highlands, the spiritual room was overtly Christian with some less visible evidence of the presence of other faiths:

"I'm Jewish. Going to the spiritual room, I thought it was just a quiet room - now it's turned into a church - I don't feel comfortable and feel excluded. We need just a quiet place to sit. Now it's a church, its great for some but not everyone is a Christian practitioner."

On the other hand Christian services on the weekend are well attended and very much appreciated.

(Since we held these meetings we have been told that the seating in the spiritual room has been made less formal and that other faiths are more visibly catered for; for instance by providing prayer mats and indicators of the direction of Mecca. There is also a library of books relating to other faiths. We have been asked to make it clear that the chaplain does welcome people of all faiths or no faiths and has had training in working with the diversity of beliefs (and non-belief) that that people hold across Scotland).

There was a feeling amongst some of us that faith was not really encouraged in the hospital and that not all hospital staff were keen to refer people on to the chaplain. Some of us also said that in the past some faith leaders were reluctant to visit us while in hospital which was a disappointment to us. Some of us didn't know where the spiritual room was and hadn't been told it existed. In addition there was a call for more resources in the room, such as tapes and the like.

(Again since holding these meetings the spiritual quiet room is now clearly signposted in the hospital and tapes are kept by the chaplain to be borrowed if wished. A small Spiritual Care Library is also being set up).

Some of us also felt a little wary of asking to see the chaplain. We worried about how he would respond to our concerns and worries and whether he would make judgements about our own particular faith.

Some of us regretted the loss of the old church at Craig Dunain which we thought was lovely.

There was call from some of us to have access to this sort of service in the mental health communities outside of New Craigs as well as in the hospital itself.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For mental health professionals:

1. We need a greater understanding from the people who help us of the benefits of faith and spirituality to the recovery of some people with a mental illness.
2. We need to have an idea of when it is appropriate for workers to share their own faith with patients and when this is not a good idea.

For faith communities:

3. We need faith communities and spiritual leaders to understand the reality of mental illness from a user's perspective and how it may affect our faith.
4. We need faith communities to consider ways of making themselves more accessible to people with a mental illness.
5. We need faith communities to become better equipped to deal with the distress we may experience through mental illness.

For the New Craigs Chaplaincy Service:

6. We need to acknowledge and expand on the good work of the New Craigs chaplaincy service.
7. We need to make sure that non Christian faiths are visibly catered for in New Craigs Hospital.

For all of us:

8. We need a better understanding of the boundaries between mental illness and religion and spirituality.

APPENDIX: New Craigs Spiritual Care Servic

The Spiritual Care Service at New Craigs hospital is provided by the Chaplain, the Reverend Michael Hickford who is available for help, with prayer, worship and in private devotional exercises.

Any issues of a personal and spiritual nature can be discussed, including all aspects of loss and bereavement, relationships, personal beliefs and doubts. This service is for all people – of any religious faith or none.

You can make an appointment to see the Chaplain by contacting him at his office in New Craigs: telephone (01463) 704000 extension 2426.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Please feel free to photocopy this report. The report can be supplied in large print or on tape.

However if you use this report or quote from it or use it to inform your practice or planning please tell us about this first. This helps us know what is being done on our behalf and helps us inform our members of the effect their voice is having.

For more information on HUG, or an Information Pack, call:

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