

Gareth Tuckwell describes a hospital that continues overtly Christian ministry

BURRWOOD

Christian hospital and place of healing

Dr Paul Worthley with a patient

key points

Burrswood has always been a place of healing, founded in response to a vision Dorothy Kerin received almost 100 years ago shortly after being completely restored to health: 'to heal the sick, comfort the sorrowing and give faith to the faithless'.

Burrswood is now a hospital licensed by the Care Quality Commission with 40 beds, a busy outpatients wing, a refurbished church and a guest house. 'We never impose our Christian faith but believe in living out gospel values at the bedside.'

The staff and volunteers would like Burrswood to be better known and dream that one day they would be able to offer treatment and care irrespective of people's ability to contribute to the cost. They invite visits and prayer.

There is still an overtly Christian hospital in the UK that is alive and well. Burrswood, in Kent, is an international resource for the Christian church that demonstrates a practical outworking of Christ's call to heal, with a marriage of orthodox medical treatment and care alongside Christian ministry and an expectation that Jesus heals today.

Burrswood is a place of healing. We believe we offer excellence in interdisciplinary healthcare, where hurting and broken people discover the love of Christ in action. As staff and volunteers, we aim for Burrswood to be a prophetic outworking of Christ's call to heal that looks at people and relationships and the impact of illness, rather than just focusing on disease processes and polypharmacy. This is a work of God born out of obedience to God's call.

The vision

That call was given to Dorothy Kerin nearly 100 years ago. She describes in her book *The Living Touch*¹ how during the days following her healing, when she had been for the most part in a coma and with her family gathered around her bed, she received a vision from God. In this vision she was brought back to life 'to heal the sick, comfort the sorrowing and give faith to the faithless'. These concepts have been at the centre of Burrswood's developing vision ever since it was founded in 1948.

Over recent years Burrswood has obtained hospital registration and is therefore licensed by the Care Quality Commission. In the last decade we

have raised over £5 million for major refurbishment and now have an amazing 40-bed hospital, a busy outpatients wing, a church, and a guest house. The focus of the hospital is on treatment and care of the whole person and the team has developed particular areas of expertise, all of which are undergirded by prayer.

Areas of expertise

- Immediate post-operative recovery supported 24/7 by a medical team
- Intensive rehabilitation with treatments such as hydrotherapy to maximise recovery
- Complex respite care during which patients receive individual treatment plans to help them live more fully despite their difficulties
- Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS/ME): the team has seen many lives transformed through individualised programmes of treatment and care
- Certain acute illnesses where an integrated whole person approach is offered with intravenous therapies, transfusions and interventions as required
- Counselling is offered for a range of psychological and emotional problems which are amenable to short term intensive work in a supportive environment; we also offer a week of treatment specifically designed to help manage stress and anxiety
- Palliative and end of life care with expert symptom control and spiritual care, with a bed for as long as required

Is a place like Burrswood still needed?

Why do we need a place like Burrswood in the 21st century? I believe that all Burrswood has to offer has never been more relevant or more needed.

Acute healthcare today is seen in terms of specialties, subspecialties and procedures, rather than being centred round individuals and the totality of their need; a need that often springs from illness and isolation. As doctors we barely have time to think outside the box. Scans, biochemistry and a good examination mean that it seems less necessary that we really listen to the patient.

At Burrswood we have the luxury of being able to spend up to 90 minutes admitting a patient. It is then we so often find that the patient's story has not been heard in depth. Tuning in to language and emotion can be so helpful, and lead to the real cause of malaise and dysfunction coming to light. At last we begin to see the person in the patient.

As far as spiritual care goes, with NHS Trusts driven to balance the books at all costs and only spending on 'best value', there is growing evidence that employing chaplains is seen as low priority. Yet, whatever our faith or lack of it, within us all there is a search for meaning. We need opportunities to make sense of what comes our way and to derive meaning from it. Although Burrswood is an Anglican foundation with three Anglican chaplains, there are also Free Church and Roman Catholic lay chaplains within the large volunteer team. People of all faiths or none are made to feel very welcome. We never impose our Christian faith but believe in living out gospel values at the bedside.

Falling through the gaps

While I wholeheartedly believe in the NHS, Burrswood must be there to bring hope to the increasing number of people who fall through the gaps in healthcare provision.

We have a passion for something better, particularly for those who have lost hope, meaning and purpose; for those whose illness has taken them over and sometimes become their identity. Such people come to Burrswood and hopefully find a love at the heart of care that centres on them, accepts them as they are and believes in them as individuals.

We aim to offer excellence in whole person healthcare. Sometimes a diagnosis that has eluded others is made. Sometimes fuller recovery is achieved. Sometimes faith is found or renewed.

We are committed to person centred, quality care that is not afraid to work in difficult areas of life if that is what is needed. Because none of us is going to live forever, sometimes that also means helping people to pack their bags with what matters most for them as death draws closer.

Making Burrswood better known

We would like Burrswood to be better known. The demand for beds is often strong but we long for everyone in the UK to know of Burrswood and

to realise it is delivering cutting edge care. The Chair of a nearby PCT says we undersell ourselves. The PCT have no concerns about our 'Christian' label; they go for our values, our added value, and our ability to offer complex care. What opportunities the 'Big Society' will bring, and how we will best interface with GP Commissioning Consortia and care pathways is yet to be seen.

It costs £4 million a year to run Burrswood. All-inclusive hospital charges are in the region of £300 a day and last year we helped 37% of patients receive financial support with the cost of their care. The demands on our bursary fund (Access to Care) will probably reach £500,000 this year but in reality we can only give out in bursary support the profits of our trading arm (£60,000) and donations specifically given.

How can you help? Do look at our website, read about the CFS research programme, check out the same day admission process, and remember we take people from across the UK and beyond. We'd like to make connections with people who may be able to help, including people or companies who might sponsor events for us. Like everybody else, we need funds to see us through this critical time in our development. But truly, above all, we would value prayer – see specific needs at www.burrswood.org.uk

What is our dream? That one day we are able to offer treatment and care irrespective of people's ability to contribute to the cost of their clinical care. Please pray with us that our dream might become reality!

PS

One 40-year-old patient wrote about what she had found at Burrswood after two admissions largely paid for by our Access to Care Fund:

'If it were not for Burrswood I'm not sure that I would have survived. This statement may seem dramatic, but I know at a very deep level that in my case it's not. I cannot imagine there is anywhere else that provides a person in their entirety with such a level of total care. I am a living testament to the fact that God's 'work' that is done at Burrswood doesn't diminish as you leave, but is so embedded into your soul that it becomes part of your new healed or healing self. Burrswood will always be 'in' me and I will always be able to factually recount the healing that is ongoing in me because of my time spent there.'

Gareth Tuckwell was Medical Director of Burrswood from 1986 to 1999 and was reappointed as CEO in 2007. He invites visits: gareth.tuckwell@burrswood.org.uk



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reference

1. Kerin D. *The Living Touch*. The Dorothy Kerin Trust, 4th Edition 2008