

CMF Writing Workshop

fighting for justice

Kate Walker discovers that compassion sometimes means fighting for justice for our patients



Isn't it great when life just seems to tick along and everything fits neatly into place? No stress, no pressure, no unexpected bills to pay, skills to acquire or deadlines to meet, you can just cruise on through your day, happily getting on with the oh-so-familiar tasks and procedures that construct your daily routine.

After seven months of hard grafting at a new job I was happily nestling down into such a care-free world when bam! I was landed with 'problem' patients; two mobile elderly ladies with leg ulcers who didn't 'fit' into any of the commissioned community services. Neither my

practice nor the tissue viability service had the capacity or were indeed paid to deliver the long-term care they required and the district nurses refused the pair on account of their mobility. I had three options. 1) Don't get involved as technically, it wasn't my problem. 2) Convince my managers to provide care for these patients as a 'one-off' whilst the commissioners hopefully sort something else for the future, or 3) advocate for a change in the service so long-term patients don't slip through the net. I opted for option 2, patting myself on the back for being a good Christian and demonstrating love and compassion, whilst saving myself from a

hopeless campaign. But did I? Was that the response Jesus would have taken?

Ask me to define compassion and I will conjure up an image of Jesus tending to the poor, touching the leper and healing the rejected; aka nursing. As such, for years I've focused on developing other virtues, knowing I had compassion 'in the bag'. But compassion is more than that. Passages such as Isaiah 1:17 remind us that demonstrating compassion includes 'taking up the cause', fighting for justice and bringing God's kingdom here on earth. By touching the leper, Jesus wasn't just healing him, he was destroying society's social constructs and challenging authority; he was fighting for justice.

Working in such a huge organisation like the NHS can make one feel like a mere puppet. As policies swap and change at the top, we dutifully leap to meet the targets, apologise to patients for the delay and all too often, find ourselves quite literally picking up the pieces. Yet I'm the first to admit that the politics and bureaucracy of today's NHS makes my head spin. Keeping my head down and carrying on with the task at hand is far easier. As nurses and midwives we are well trained to lay hands on the sick and tend to their needs, but we forget that we are instructed, not just by the NMC, but by Jesus Christ, to be patients' advocates, their voice.

Like my female patients with leg ulcers, I'm sure you all know someone who is subject to unfair treatment and in need of compassion. I challenge you to step up and speak out. I know it is a scary and daunting ask. I recognise that it might involve a few precious hours on your day off, or have the potential to upset relations with your manager. However it won't always involve a fight with authorities. Sometimes a referral to the right team may be enough or even raising the issue in a team meeting; it's surprising what managers and consultants can miss when their focus is on disease or numbers. At the least, demonstrating compassion requires us to take the blinkers off, recognise situations as unjust (and not just another loophole) and give that little bit extra.

Come Monday, I shall return to work ready for the fight, ready to serve God and glorify his name, even if it means going outside my comfort zone. Surely, it is not a role I should fear or dread, but one to uphold gladly, proud to be granted such an opportunity to serve in God's Kingdom. Being a follower of Christ isn't meant to be a walk in the park, but as Psalm 23 teaches us, we don't have to 'walk through the shadow of the valley of death' every day. We will, at some point, find ourselves beside quiet waters once again. 🌿