

Sarah Wright shares the lessons learnt from helping set up a CMF Group at Shrewsbury District General Hospital



FINDING FELLOWSHIP IN SHREWSBURY

In the West Midlands, on the border of Wales, lies Shrewsbury with its district general hospital. I started here as an FY1 back in August 2018 and now look forward to my FY2 year. When I started as a junior doctor, I knew a couple of Christians who worked at Shrewsbury Hospital, but that was about it. It can be a lonely time starting out as a doctor, or in any healthcare job for that matter. Suddenly from the lovely comforts of university and home, one is thrown into a new setting, with new colleagues and a new lifestyle. It can be difficult to remain firm in your faith when a crippled healthcare system makes demands upon your energy and strength. But it's not our strength we should be relying on.

'Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.' (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Fellowship with our church is key, but we must remember a huge part of our life is spent at work. We would be ignoring our calling if we were to leave our faith and fellowship at the hospital doors.

With the help of vascular surgeon Mr Andy Houghton and GP Louise Houghton, who both had much valuable experience of CMF, we started a regular, local CMF group in Shrewsbury. Our aim was to pull together Christian health professionals from Shropshire for a time of fellowship, to pause and reflect over God's word and what he is speaking into our lives – both in and out of work.

Whilst I was reaching out to my junior doctor colleagues, Andy was doing so with his consultant colleagues. To gather support, we created a simple poster outlining the details of the meeting: a discussion led by a supper. This poster went everywhere, from the doctors' mess to every staff room in the hospital. It was emailed to the postgraduate administrator who forwarded it to all junior doctors. This led to a huge set of positive responses. People often ask how is it that publicity is possible in an environment that shelves faith, and I say to people, 'If I wanted to set up a cycling club, I would do the same thing.' God had the true vision for this and saw how to bring it to fruition.

From a small group of individuals, it has grown to over 20 attending the Christmas gathering. We meet up once a month, at the same time, at the Houghton's. We have created a mailing list, have the support of the hospital chaplain and it has been great to see new members lead sessions. Most recently, we heard Derek Willis, Medical Director of Severn Hospice, speak to us about the ethics of palliative medicine, with practical explanations of real-life scenarios. As Proverbs mentions: *'As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another'* (Proverbs 27:17). Our faith is made stronger by gathering in his name.

Over the year, I have seen God's blessing upon our group in the way he has guided us towards each other. I give thanks for the fellowship and prayers we have shared.

Top tips for setting up your own group:

- **Create an audience:** who is it that you're trying to attract to the group? Some groups have a variety of backgrounds, whereas others cater for a specific group ie students, junior doctors, nurses, etc. Think about who you want to target.
- **Gather support:** do you know of any Christians in your area who can help you? The chaplaincy at the hospital could be a good place to start as they may know of other Christians within the hospital, especially among the consultants and seniors. Find another Christian to help you even if the first meeting is just the two of you. God has promised to be there. *'For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.'* (Matthew 18:20)
- **Find a venue:** try to keep it consistent so that people can find you even if they miss a meeting. Some groups meet in a member's home, whereas some groups meet over lunch in the hospital chapel.
- **Decide what you want to achieve:** do you want to meet and chat about prayer requests and pray with each other? Do you want to have a talk from a local health professional, or do you want a social meeting to get to know each other? It can often be good to have a mix of these over a term.
- **Advertise:** ask if it can go on the staff notice board, in the mess, emailed around to staff etc Make sure the poster or email is clear and mentions where, when and why you are meeting. Consider putting a contact number or email address so that people can find out more.
- **Consider using WhatsApp to keep in touch and support each other at work.** Sometimes a quick message to say 'I'm having a bad day at work' can result in messages of support and prayers to lift your spirit.
- **Pray.** If God wants it to happen, it will happen. *'Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.'* (Proverbs 16:3)

To find out more about CMF groups that might be meeting in your area or place of work, contact the office, or check the website at cmf.org.uk/doctors/cmf-local-contacts

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