

The Bishop of Carlisle, James Newcome yesterday spoke in support of the Access to Palliative Care Bill, a private member's Bill tabled by Baroness Finlay of Llandaff.

Speaking in the debate, Bishop James reiterated a widespread call for greater training for generalists in end of life care provision, saying 'this whole area is distinctly patchy' and is exacerbated by staff shortages. Reflecting the findings of the the House of Commons Health Select Committee report, he called for greater communication between trusts and multidisciplinary teams as well as between staff and patients.

The Bishop of Carlisle referred to the need for palliative care provision in prisons reflecting a contribution by the Bishop of Rochester, James Langstaff, on Thursday to a short debate on palliative care. Highlighting the importance of palliative care provision to an ageing prison population, the Bishop of Rochester asked the Government to report on progress made in addressing a range of issues that arise from an older age profile and on whether it will create more prison palliative care suites in addition to the ten already established.

The Bishop of Carlisle emphasised in the same debate on Thursday the need in all palliative care for spiritual support in addition to alleviation of physical pain, calling for retention of healthcare chaplains, whose roles have been under threat. He said, 'Their special training and expertise equip them to offer compassionate spiritual care to everyone, as well as religious care to those who need it; and "everyone" includes relatives and staff.'

Calling for systems where chaplains are treated as full members of multidisciplinary care teams, Bishop James said, ' I was talking with a palliative consultant who is the end of life lead in a large hospital in the north of England. She mentioned the electronic order sets which automatically trigger requests to the chaplaincy team and to the end of life nurse. That, she said, has made an amazing difference, and has meant that every patient dying in that trust has access to a chaplain.'

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (Lord Prior of Brampton) endorsed the 'incredibly important work that chaplains do in hospitals' adding that they with 'the whole mass of volunteers who work with them give comfort and support not only to relatives and those who are dying, but also to the staff in hospitals who have to work closely in very distressing circumstances.'

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