

## WHAT IS HEALTH MINISTRY?



Health ministry is an area of the church's mission that has seen significant revival in recent years. Whilst the National Health Service takes care of us when it comes to illness, there's more to physical health than cure for sickness ... there's wellbeing, self care, healthy eating, exercise, environmental concerns, healthy management of long-term illness, and safety. And there's much more to health than physical wellness; there's spiritual health too ... something that the church has to offer. So health ministry is about churches getting more involved in physical, mental, and social wellbeing combined with intentional care of the spirit - like we can see in the ministry of Jesus.

### What is its history?

The church has always been involved in health care; healing was part of early church life, and hospitals were started by monks and nuns. In the nineteenth century, Baptist deaconesses had to train as nurses before they entered theological college, and when they went on their rounds they wore nurses' uniform. More recently, in 1985, a hospital chaplain named Granger Westberg saw the potential for Christian nurses to lead health care programmes through local churches in Chicago. He began with six nurses and there are now 11,000 nurses working through churches around the world, in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Swaziland. It started in the UK in November 2004, and since then forty-four nurses from all denominations have taken up the training.

### Is this social work or mission?

It's mission. Jesus sent people out to preach and to heal. His concerns were for people to be whole - spiritually and physically. Whenever he encountered someone, he cared about their spiritual needs as well as their physical needs and vice versa. So why do we continue to separate these out?

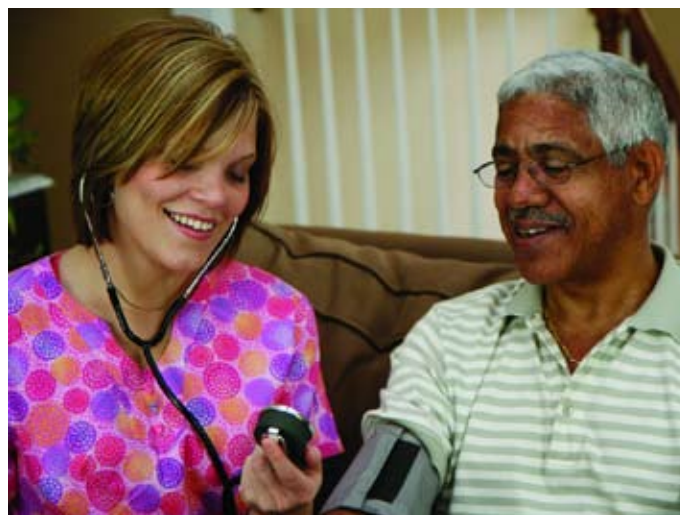


## Should not the NHS be doing the health bit?

They are, to some extent, though NHS care has become highly medicalised. We have hospital chaplains who do a great work and need our support. But people don't stay in hospital very long these days and still need spiritual care when they leave hospital. Besides this, the NHS is always trying to find ways for people to take better care of themselves, and welcomes the involvement of the voluntary sector.

## How does a church incorporate Health Ministry into its mission programme?

Through registered nurses with community experience, if you have them. Nurses aren't just givers of injections and bedpans! They are trained to coordinate all kinds of health-care interventions around an individual of any age, a family or a community. So, if they are spiritually mature Christians as well, they may have the skills to be able to look at the whole person, identify needs and call in the appropriate help. Many churches have nurses among their congregations who would love to be using their skills with the local church. They can then do the one week introductory course for Parish Nursing, and lead the health ministry as part of the ministry team. They can start this simply by offering a few voluntary hours a week. They will soon begin to mobilise other health professionals and congregation members who will begin to realise the community bridges that can be built through this ministry. All of those who have become Parish nurses in the last three years have expressed an unavoidable sense of call to this ministry. Even if you don't have a nurse, there might one in a nearby church who would be interested. Alternatively, you can invite health professionals to give talks as part of your activities, or encourage simple things like increasing the amount of exercise that everyone does. You can then gather a group together to build on this and look for local grant-funding to employ or appoint a nurse.



## Have people found faith through Health Ministry?

Yes - and been baptised. People have also grown in their faith through it. Statistics show that over one-third of the total conversations with clients include prayer and/or a faith-related conversation; nurses follow their professional code of conduct and faith is treated in a way that is respectful of a person's own faith journey. So there is no pressure brought to bear upon anyone. If someone comes from another faith or denomination and would prefer help from that source, then appropriate referrals are made. In one town 'Emma', who was suffering from depression, attended a support group run by a Parish Nurse who also had mental health qualifications. She found a lot of help through prayer and, after much searching, became a follower of Jesus. In another town 'Tom' came into contact with the Parish Nurse when his wife died. She began to visit him regularly and introduced him to others in the local church. He was eventually baptised and became a church member. In a village 'Bill', who needed support at home, was referred through the GP practice, assessed by a Parish Nurse and subsequently visited by a member of the congregation. 'Bill' said he was an atheist and so they didn't say much to him about faith, but one Sunday morning, to their complete surprise, a church door opened and there he was in his wheelchair. At the time of writing he hasn't made any kind of commitment but he admits to being on a journey of discovery.

## Parish Nursing in a small church:

A Northamptonshire village church holds its services in the community centre and runs a coffee shop there during the week, using local volunteers. They wanted to find a way of reaching their fairly isolated community. Two of their members were nurses - one a health visitor just about to retire and the other a practice nurse. The health visitor wanted to do some work for the church using her skills and so, instead of withdrawing from the Nursing and Midwifery Council register, she kept her registration on and attended the Parish Nursing training week. The church appointed her officially as their Parish Nurse and then she began to get volunteers to help visit needy people around the village. She also sees her clients in the coffee shop and toddler group. The amount of work began to build up and now the second nurse has completed the course and is helping to enlarge the ministry there. In one year they had 335 personal contacts with people, and 167 of these included reference to faith or prayer. They also ran fifty-eight health promotion and screening sessions for the village.

## Parish Nursing in a larger church:

A Surrey church is close to a large hospital and has several nurses in its congregation. They wanted to know more about Parish Nursing and so they invited Helen Wordsworth to go and run a seminar at the church for those who had professional health interests. Following this, one of the nurses undertook the introductory course and was appointed to lead the programme. She was able to offer just one day a week on a voluntary basis but was supported by other health professionals in the church. Being in a commuter area, they were particularly aware of the pressures facing business people and the possible effects this could have on their health. So they organised a healthy breakfast for business men and incorporated a session on men's health from a local GP. This turned out to be an extremely hilarious event, much appreciated by

all, and was followed by a similar one for women. One of the aims of Parish Nursing is to try to enable the congregation themselves to live more healthily so that its service to the community can be more effective. Nurses can offer and/or facilitate training in a variety of volunteer activities so that families in the community can be reached and helped. It therefore becomes a bridge-building activity, enabling friendships to be made between church, community, and professional workers.

## But we have no nurses in our church....

It's even possible to recruit a nurse from a nearby church, voluntary or paid, to work with your church. There are examples of this being done both in a voluntary and a paid capacity.

Parish Nursing Ministries UK can make contacts for you and provide advice on recruitment.

Parish Nursing Ministries UK is very willing to run a lunchtime or evening seminar on Parish Nursing at your church and you could invite other churches nearby. Why not contact them on 01788 817292 to arrange this as a next step?



Parish Nursing students and trainers at their Study Week in Dunchurch: [back] Bea Magowan, Helen Wordsworth (National Co-ordinator), Noreen Gilhespy; [front] Jane Cripps, Tracey Ingram, Doreen Simcox, Lynda Bickley

## Where can I find out more?

More information is available on the Parish Nursing website [www.parishnursing.co.uk](http://www.parishnursing.co.uk) or from the Revd Helen Wordsworth on 01788 817292 or [helen.w@parishnursing.co.uk](mailto:helen.w@parishnursing.co.uk) or contact your regional minister.

This leaflet is one of a series which has been produced by the Mission Department.

For more information about health ministry please contact your local association or college (see contact details below) or contact the department on 01235 517716 / email [equipping@baptist.org.uk](mailto:equipping@baptist.org.uk)



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