

POSTSCRIPT

FOR WHOM THE BELLS TOLL?

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This article has been submitted by a patient, and we are pleased to let him speak for himself.

[Ed]

“We believe you should attend the Day Centre” was the suggestion made by a varied number of Health and Social Services executives at the conclusion of my two recent extended periods of hospitalisation.

Eventually I found myself preparing for this ‘new’ experience and frankly looking forward to this unknown semi hospital cum rehabilitation stratagem, minus of course the excellent routine medical care! This departure from secure and complete, hospital-controlled activity filled me with a touch of acute anxiety realising that I had now reached a time in my medical existence when I would basically be on my own. So be it! I truly believe however that my current prolonged life will continue with renewed vigour.

Following careful arrangements, the well-equipped hospital vehicle arrived at my home with the driver (John) together with his observant mate (Dianne) carefully guiding me into the transport. We are about seven miles from the Bede Day Centre situated at the Richardson Hospital, Barnard Castle with the lovely experience of viewing the local landscape denied me for so long! This gratifying countryside experience lingered with me for days.

The weekly release from my enforced domestic scene - not my personal choice – enabled me to participate and enjoy mixed-company conversations with similar medical frailties! This third stage of medical restoration and rehabilitation is a most welcome aspect of rejuvenation carefully planned by the NHS through the several aftercare organisations. A very comforting service of which I was unaware - especially for the anticipatory immobile

person. The regular weekly introductions to the chummy sessions at the Bede Day Centre commenced with the efficient arrival of cheery and delightful lady carer Dianne, along with the comedic driver John - just the man for the job. The specially-adapted vehicle seating about ten according to their current ability! This rather unique vehicle invariably picked me up first, then proceeding around the south west Durham area collecting my fellow medical companions. In observing each of them from their home into the bus I was always impressed with the amazing care and friendliness each boarding patient received. This enhanced diligent attitude was endemic throughout as I so pleasantly discovered as time went on!

The house reception on each visit was friendly and sustained which I recall never faded throughout the many sessions I attended. Naturally these visits do occasionally founder but not seriously. Simple exercises, quiz sessions, bingo and the inevitable dominoes create a pleasant and useful camaraderie and break for the recovering and feeble participants. Other activities (especially for the ladies) include knitting, crocheting and needlepoint. My view however, regrettably indicates a lack of ‘clinical brainology’ intended to sharpen up the mind and responses. For instance I was occasionally seated next to a very pleasant lady who kept asking me “have you been here before?” Apart from politely responding to her innocent and friendly repetitive question I reminded myself of a constant thought. Individuals attending these sessions, not all of course, are subject to ‘fading minds’ and need nurturing, to assist them also in other aspects of mind restoration. Loneliness and deprivation guiltily spring to mind! I have changed my

attitude towards these super-old insular citizens - they deserve improved status in their transient final years.

This particular line of thought has been taken up by Baroness Greenfield, Director of the Royal Institution who recently launched in the House of Lords a new proposed computer software fitness regime called "Mindfit" which hopefully will be nationally available in two years' time dealing with dementia in its many forms. It was at the time of reading this article that I realised that my own mind - after four strokes - could do with a serious dose of natural expressive stimulation!

The other side of this particular dissertation must certainly give praise for the admirable staff in this semi medical set up, so obviously chosen for their skills in dealing with this vulnerable group of patients

I am currently a fortunate recipient of a thoughtful invitation, through the good offices of my local medico Dr Ian Waldin, in collaboration with Sister Joy McCulloch, MBE, {deservedly} to re-embark in the pioneering recuperative Cardiac Rehabilitation Programme at the Darlington Memorial Hospital.

Previously over several years – since 1986 in fact – I have spent several extended successful physical recovery sessions with this praiseworthy and stimulating unit. I am grateful to be returning for further life extension assistance! You might ask why I am gratefully returning to this splendid restorative unit. It's simply because my over-riding desire to return to 'physical improvement' that normal hospital routines cannot offer. Quite naturally - their mission is to restore patients like me to this envious level I am now addressing. I hope I further succeed. Too many people keep reminding me that at my age I should be content with growing old. I am not accepting that path to extinction. I still have a lot I would like to do, so please forgive my continued zest for life!