

# Vital role played by hospital wheelers



Rosemary Harris and Ernie Chapman

**GLOBETROTTING engineer Bal suffered a bodyblow when he was struck down by serious illness four years ago.**

The 42-year-old was hit by the life-threatening brain disease encephalitis, and ended up in the Queen Alexandra Hospital in Portsmouth for two and a half months. He lost his speech and his mobility and other stroke-like symptoms.

“It can quickly result in death if not treated correctly,” said Bal. “I never knew about this devastating illness, but since this event, I have learnt of several other people within my circle of friends and colleagues who have also been struck by it. Two have sadly died as the diagnosis was not made quickly enough.

“Ironically I am lucky to have fallen ill in Hampshire as the NHS in both Portsmouth

and Southampton was nothing short of being excellent.”

Lying in his ward, Bal – who was born in the West Midlands to Punjabi parents – was initially unaware that his wife and his two young sons were regularly visiting the hospital chapel. As his condition slowly improved, Bal began visiting the chapel himself – transported by the volunteer wheelers for the Portsmouth Hospital Chaplaincy team.

“The chaplains are all great,” he said. “The chapel services were strengthening and a helpful part of my recovery. When someone feels vulnerable and at risk – depressed even – they need to feel nearer to God.”

Bal is grateful to the hospital, its chaplaincy, and the wheelers who got him to Sunday services, for helping his recovery.

“I have a son who was about three when I was taken ill,” he

said. “If it hadn’t been for the Queen Alexandra, I would not have made 40, or had input into his life.”

Among those who help with the vital function of pushing wheelchairs to the hospital chapel is retired teacher Ernie Chapman. The 75-year-old, who worships at Holy Rood, Stubbington, is also a chaplains’ assistant, visiting ward patients on a weekday.

He finds it useful to link the two roles – assuring patients he has spoken to in the week that he will wheel them to the chapel service on Sunday if they would like to attend.

“I also enjoy relating to regulars – people who are in hospital for some months and who I get to know really well as I push them to chapel,” said Ernie.

And Rosemary Harris, from St Mary’s Church, Liss, also acts as both chaplains’ assistant and wheelchair pusher, and

finds that they overlap well.

“I feel we are helping to form the church community in the hospital,” she said. “Some people haven’t been to church for years. One lady I met on the ward had returned to her earlier faith and it was clearly important in meeting her spiritual and emotional needs. It helped her cope with health and family problems.

“Attending chapel reinforced this. I talked with her about faith giving meaning and direction in our lives, and she wanted to share that with her family. In the end around eight of them accompanied her to chapel.”

There are around a dozen other wheelers. They each go into the hospital once a month, between about 9.50am and 12noon on a Sunday morning.

Could you become part of a monthly wheelchair pushers’ rota? Please contact Su Bishop on 023-9228 6408 to help.

## Lego Church concept launched in New Year

A NEW fun and creative way for families to explore Bible stories using Lego starts in Farlington in January.

Build@Church will involve families hearing a Bible story, responding to it using Lego and Duplo bricks, praying using the bricks before sharing tea and cake together.

It will meet on the second Saturday of the month at the Church of the Resurrection, Penrhyn Ave, Drayton, from 2pm-4pm. The first is on Saturday 9 January. There will be no meeting in August.

Rector Paul Gully said: “We wanted to create a space for families to come, hear stories from the Bible and be able to respond to those stories creatively using Lego and Duplo bricks.

“It might be that they want to recreate the story using the bricks and mini-figures or they might want to make something which for them demonstrates the theme of that story. It is totally up to them and not at all prescriptive.

“The stories will be told in a range of ways including showing videos on the big screen, acting out the stories

and using puppets.

“Our hope is that it helps people to encounter the love of God for themselves and respond to that, build relationships as a family and with other families who come.

“We will also pray using the Lego bricks. One of the prayers that we will use will involve people holding a Lego or Duplo brick, counting the number of bumps on it and then thinking of that number of people or situations that need God’s help or that number of people or things that they would like to

thank God for.

“We will then share tea and cake together. I am really excited about seeing how people respond to this space.”

The event is free but donations are welcome towards the cost of the food and families will be invited to bring a cake to share if they would like to. The group also plans to donate some of the money collected to a local charity at the end of each term. This charity will be chosen by those who come. For details, see: [www.farlingtonparish.co.uk/buildatchurch](http://www.farlingtonparish.co.uk/buildatchurch)