



THE
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Care, Concern, Compassion

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PEOPLE ARE NOT THINGS

Lord Ramsbotham

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I am deeply honoured to have been given the privilege of speaking at this formal launch of the Trust named after one of the most lovely and memorable people I have ever met. I say that because not only can I publicly honour Elizabeth Bryan's memory, also say something about the importance of "compassion, empathy and intelligent kindness" – the values that Libby placed at the heart - and were the hallmark of her work, not only with her beloved Multiple Birth Foundation, but with the National Health Service that she treasured – in today's troubled world.

Libby had absolutely no connection with the Army, other than through her remarkable father, who had who had a most distinguished war record, being decorated several times for gallantry. But twice during my career I had particular cause to be grateful to her, for entirely different reasons. Firstly, her husband, Ronald, will remember their staying with us in Belfast in early 1980, when I had to abandon my guests to mount an operation in which the SAS detachment under my command tried to capture the most effective IRA gun team during the whole campaign, which had murdered fifteen policemen over a two year period. To cut a long story short, we captured the gun team, and its lethal American machine gun, but not before it had killed my particularly delightful and able young SAS troop commander, giving rise to that curious emotional mix of triumph and tragedy. I have always been grateful that Ronald and Libby were there, because their application of "compassion, empathy and intelligent kindness" not only gave me first-hand experience of its value, but was an absolutely invaluable aid to enabling me to get on with what had to be done.

Five years later, while commanding a Division in Germany, one of my Brigades was nominated to pilot a scheme called Home Start, which I was told was about helping and teaching new mothers to look after their babies. This was particularly relevant in Germany, where young wives were often left alone in flats in large buildings, far away from their own family and friends, amongst Germans with whom they could not communicate, while their husbands were away in Northern Ireland for six months. Libby told me that she was one of the founders of Home Start, and so I put her in touch with the wife of the Commander of the Garrison in which it was to be piloted. Libby devoted an immense amount of time helping and advising; the subsequent successful adoption of Home Start right across the Army is a tribute to both of them.

Before coming to the NHS, I am afraid that I am going to take you on two other brief lateral journeys; firstly may I explain the text and title of my contribution? Every

activity on the floor of the House of Lords is timed by digital clocks, which are set at "00.00" at the start of every discussion, or individual contribution to a timed debate, telling everyone how long it has been going on or when you must shut up and sit down. On a number of occasions, when speaking about the Criminal Justice System, I have said that I wished that, instead of saying "00.00", the clocks said "PANT", standing for "People Are Not Things", an acronym that I would like to see on the desk of every Minister or official who had anything to do with the treatment of and conditions for offenders. I also suggest that it could be on the desks of every single NHS Minister and official.

I say that because it seems to me that, gradually, over the years, an impersonal cult of managerialism has insidiously superseded personal leadership of and within operational organisations, by which I mean diktat by paperwork, target and performance indicator, rather than hands-on leadership by named people, responsible and accountable for particular activities and functions. This may be all right if you are dealing with things, such as baked beans, but not with people, each of whom, thank God, is an individual. I learned about the importance of leadership in the Army, which is a people organisation, and, as a soldier, it has always intrigued me that, if you look at boards listing former subordinate commanders in two other people organisations - Chief Constables or Prison Governors - you will find that, certainly before World War II, the majority had military rank. Apparently, they were appointed not because of their policing or penal skills, but in order to lead the staff, it being accepted then that, unless things are right for staff, nothing will be right for their "clients" - to use the contemporary word.

My first sight of the Prison Service was the Headquarters of the Prison Commission, a non-departmental body which ran prisons in this country until 1962, which was next door to that of my regiment - The Rifle Brigade - in Ecclestone Square in London. I did not know it then but, apparently it was staffed by 128 people, without computers, responsible for 40,000 prisoners in England and Wales, with nominated people responsible and accountable for different types of prison and prisoner throughout the country. Today the Headquarters of what is called the National Offender Management Service, responsible for 87,000 prisoners, has a staff of over 3,000, with computers, with no nominated people responsible and accountable for different types of prison or prisoner. The aim of the Criminal Justice System is to protect the public by preventing re-offending, reflected in what is called the re-offending rate, which is in fact a nonsense because it simply cannot be measured. All that can be measured is the reconviction rate, and, judging by that, the old Prison Commission was far more successful than the current National Offender Management Service. I have always felt that the depressingly continuous record of failure in this regard is that no one, no named person, is responsible and accountable for the performance of any part of the system, success or failure being measured not by outcome but by process, in other words treating people as things. As outcomes are dependent on staff, who need leadership and support, I always think that the principal victims of this approach are staff, not prisoners.

This is not the time or place to talk about improving the Criminal Justice System, about which I have to admit that I know rather more than I do about the National Health Service, in which I only have short form as Chairman of an acute hospital Trust, and longer form as an advisor to the Centre for Mental Health. But, in order to link what I have said so far, with the business of this new Foundation Trust, I would like to share what I regard as some important similarities between the two, because the position of Prisons in the Criminal Justice System is very analogous to that of hospitals in the NHS. Both are the acute part, to which you should only be sent if you

need the treatment that only they can provide. Treatment will not be complete in either, but will have to be continued in the community in the form of aftercare. Neither can function properly if choked with people who do not need or should not be there. At the heart of what each do are relationships between staff and their clients, every member of staff needing to be trained to carry out a particular task, and to know to whom they are responsible and accountable for carrying that out.

But the cult of managerialism, that has become a norm in the Criminal Justice System, has insinuated itself into the NHS, where Professor Pietroni put what is happening so clearly to me:

The crisis we now observe is in part due to the way in which the values [Libby espoused] have been eroded by the over-emphasis on the commodification of health delivery, with the subsequent target-driven, top-down managerial model that now exists.

I well remember the problems we had with targets and over-weaning bureaucracy in the hospital I chaired. We were always being fined for some issue over bed allocation until, suddenly, it was solved. When I asked the Chief Executive how, he told me that he had had to draft a sister into the responsible post, when the incumbent went on maternity leave, and she had solved it. When I went to congratulate her, I asked whether she had known all along how to solve the problem, to which she replied "Yes", as she did when I asked whether she, and her colleagues had any other bright ideas for making practical improvements. This was the start of twice yearly "bright idea" sessions with the sisters, which invariably had positive outcomes.

Bureaucratic lunacy underpinned my experience with the daughter of old friends, who joined the hospital as an occupational therapist. After she had been there for about three months, I went to see how she was getting on, to be taken aback somewhat when she told me that I was only getting 50% of her time. "If you don't work any harder I'll have to sack you", was my immediate response, to which she replied that I did not understand. She could not give more than 50% of her time to therapy, because the rest had to be spent filling in forms about what she had done. She had to fill in separate and different forms, containing the same information, but in a different order, for each episode, which she had to send to three separate people. I asked why she did not choose the one that was easiest to fill in, and send carbon copies to the other two recipients. That was apparently more than her job was worth, and the NHS would explode! But I have always reflected that, if only those requiring information thought through the demands they were making on providers, bureaucracy could be reduced by a factor of hundreds.

But, coming nearer to this evening, I also remember two issues being brought before the Board, which recognised the importance of staff, in the difficult task of looking after patients. The first was a suggestion that the Director of Nursing should revert to her old title of Matron, acknowledging the need for leadership as well as clinical direction, which was not encouraged by the Regional Health Authority, whose opinion, apparently, had to be sought. The second was a proposal that a nurses' home building should be refurbished, with each room made en-suite, in the hope of attracting high quality staff. This duly happened, not least thanks to income from rent paid by telephone companies for putting aerials on the hospital roof, and the results were absolutely as expected. Staff were being treated as people.

These latter two examples were matched by another experience, as Trustee of a charity supporting some amazing cancer research at the Royal Free Hospital, which essentially consists of chemical reaction between a cancer and a radio-active isotope,

which destroys the cancer, without need of chemo or radio therapy. The wonderful Professor Begent, leading the research, included in his team a number of young people whose task it was to provide “compassion, empathy and intelligent kindness” to those undergoing the pilot treatment, all of whom had been told that their cancers were terminal before undergoing treatment. Libby’s instant approval of this inclusion, including the training of the young people, leads me neatly into my conclusion.

It seems to me that, more and more, in this troubled world, leadership and training, instead of becoming less relevant because machines can measure and record all that we need to know, are becoming more and more important, because, before they can resume their normal place in the order of things, their need has to be inculcated into the hearts and minds of our political and other masters, too many of whom seem to think that people are things, things living as opposed to things inanimate, but still things. They prefer the precision of measurement of the inanimate to the inevitable frailties of human judgement, too often presuming that the same measurement can be applied to humans. Thankfully there are always likely to be some like Libby around, who prove, through their work, that where people are concerned, the only really effective weapon – if that is the right word – is other people. Relationships between people are the life blood and glue of any operational organisation, be it a Regiment, a prison a hospital or a GP practice, as I listened to with fascination at a regular seminar at the surgery with which I am registered only last week. But what was equally interesting was how often a word came up, which I remember being used by a former Corporal of mine, whom I met twenty years later, as a senior officer in a Young Offender’s Institution. When I asked him what he would want if I could wave a magic wand for him, he said “Time. Twenty minutes with one of these boys, convincing him that you are a responsible adult who is interested in his future, is worth all the programmes you can ever run. But we don’t have the time.”

I am delighted that there is to be a pilot of the Trust’s plan to introduce “compassion, empathy and intelligent kindness” mentoring into a NHS hospital trust, because I suspect that others will ask for the same once its value is proved. Its value will be threefold – to the patient, to the provider and to those responsible for the quality, not just the quantity of provision. It can never be an absolute, because it requires an attitude of mind, a deliberate selflessness, which takes account of the needs of others, and therefore whose outcome cannot be measured. You can tell pretty well instantly whether the impersonal or the personal rules in any establishment, and I fear that it is the former in too many, particularly those that are deemed to have failed and been made subject of public witch-hunts. Managers, swept up in the blame culture, are likely to put what can be measured first in their efforts to convince their masters that all is now well. But the culture underneath is just as, if not more important, than the outward and visible signs. This is where it is so important that political and operational masters remember that, if nothing is right for staff, nothing will be right for patients or clients, and where the Elizabeth Bryan Foundation Trust comes in. If it can encourage more attention to the mental well-being of staff, enabling them to bring “compassion, empathy and intelligent kindness” into all their work, not only will it be punching above its weight, but it will be doing so in the name of someone to whom “People Were Not Things”.