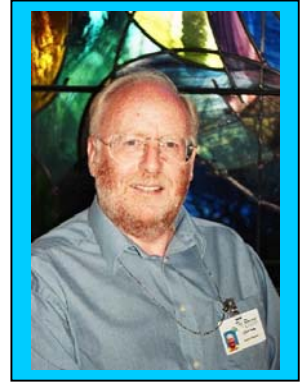


## **We all have a story!** By Lance Blake, The Rowans Hospice

I often say to people, 'We all have a story!' Some we are happy to tell, others we are less happy to relate, but this is often where my job begins. Many people think when they first see me, "Ah! the Chaplain," and therefore, 'Church and Religion.' But the truth is that the rites and rituals of religion are but a small part of what I do, and that's not surprising really when you consider that over 90 per cent of people who come to The Rowans have no deep religious affiliation despite a recent survey which says that 70 per cent of people in the UK regard themselves as Christians, probably because they were baptised at birth. But, the truth is that all people have spiritual needs even if they have no faith or recognisable belief system.



'Spirituality and spiritual care' is a phrase often heard today but more often misunderstood. For example, what is spiritual pain? And how do I begin to address this problem? The clue comes from when I said, 'We all have a story' because like all professionals, including our doctors and nurses, it starts with listening. As people come to the end of their lives they recap, re-evaluate and often struggle to make sense of their lives. The material things become less important, and family, friends, and plain loving tend to take precedence. We see family rifts resolved and other simple truths expressed as never before. I remember one man, as he was dying, telling his wife, "I really love you!" It was said with such feeling and her response was tears of joy followed by, "It's only taken him 38 \*\*\*\*\*years to tell me that!" And we all laughed.

Personally I feel that dying is much like the mystery of birth. It has its own timing about it. Like babies being born into this world, which come when they want to come, so being born into the next world, whatever you believe that to be, also has its own timing about it. In life we witness both births with awe and we hold the joy and tears of those who watch and wait with equal care. Both are a natural process but with the specialty that the hospice offers, dying can also be a special moment. I recall a lady, worn out by life and her disease, holding my hand and saying, "Lance, I didn't realise that dying could be so beautiful."

*I am part of a team who knows spiritual care forms an integral part of our overall care, and the closing words from this lady confirm to me that, for the most part, we get it right.*