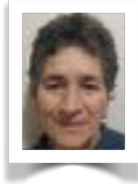


Is it goodbye to our valued Margaret Centre?

VIEWPOINT

By Eva Turner

of Addison Road Patients Group



We all treasure the Margaret Centre (pictured right), an award-winning, NHS-run specialist palliative and end-of-life care unit, housed in an outside building in Whipps Cross hospital. It is supported by donations and provides a calm, inclusive, welcoming environment. It has a pleasant, leafy garden, enables relatives to stay with their loved ones, allows pets to be brought in and offers invaluable community outreach work.

Action4Whipps (A4W), a community-led campaign, has fought the decision makers to save this precious service since 2019. When Whipps is rebuilt with many fewer beds, much of the site will be demolished and sold for housing. It is highly unlikely the centre will be rebuilt, either inside the new hospital or elsewhere on site. A4W has been told that 5-11 end-of-life care beds will be provided around the new hospital. But imagine the response if you asked to stay overnight beside your relative, let alone bring in a dog.

Last year, A4W led a postcard campaign to save the Margaret Centre. More than 2,000 local people voiced their support directly to Dame Alwyn Williams, then the chief executive of Barts NHS Trust. But the decision about its future has now been given to the NHS North East London, the integrated care board established in July to run local health services.

A committee was established in 2020 for local councillors in Waltham Forest,

Redbridge, and parts of Essex to scrutinise the plans. Two months ago the main item on the agenda was end-of-life care for the whole area. It became clear that we must all rely on community provision despite scarce resources. It was confirmed that there will be beds in the new hospital for patients who can't be cared for at home. But those of us who have looked after dying relatives know that care in a busy general hospital will never be as good as in a specialist unit. It is likely that the progress made by the hospice movement over recent decades is going to be negated.

A4W members present in September heard discussion of hospices in north-east London such as St Francis (Romford), St Joseph's (Hackney) and St Clare's (Harlow) but the Margaret Centre was barely mentioned. One councillor asked if it would be included as an option in the final plans, and was told "We don't know".

I believe we should all be worried and fight for the re-provision of a fully funded NHS equivalent to the Margaret Centre within the new Whipps. Otherwise, end of life, always a painful time for families, will become a more insensitive, arduous and disruptive experience.

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