

history

In many ways the development of Wigan and Leigh Hospice mirrors that of the Hospice movement in general. Well-intentioned individuals who recognised a local need, had a vision of how this need could be addressed, developed a plan and had the tenacity to see it through.



The story of our hospice goes back to 1977 and to a Shevington GP who had an elderly male patient who died alone in the night. The doctor recognised a trend in such distressing deaths and concluded that a team of night sitters might bring comfort to people in terminal distress.

The doctor discussed this idea with his friends, and in particular the Rotary Club of Wigan. Over the next couple of years the plan emerged and a Steering Committee was formed in 1978 and 450 people attended its inaugural meeting. The estimated cost of a Hospice including land was in the region of £600,000. The breakthrough came towards when the former vicarage at Poolstock was purchased in 1981.

Dedicated fund-raising was pursued by the newly formed 'Friends of the Hospice' and others, to raise essential funds.

This was a large Victorian building set in one acre of land, with pleasant views over what is known locally as "the flash" – a large man made lake. It was only with the support of local people, businesses and national groups that the money to purchase the building was raised. It was recognised that it would take some time to convert the building into a Hospice.

Our first domiciliary nurse and support staff were appointed in 1981 based at St Barnabas Church Hall, Marsh Green, Wigan, even before the doors of the new hospice were opened. It was recognised that the home care service was central to the hospice ideal.

Between March and September 1982 extensions were constructed to create a Day Care facility and other improvements.

Our first Matron was appointed in 1983 along with other staff when the building was nearly complete. The Hospice opened its doors in September 1983 with 5 beds that were funded purely from voluntary contributions. It was not until two months after the opening that the Health Authority agreed to provide funding towards the second five registered beds. In January 1984 the in-patient unit was increased to 10 beds, moving to 12 beds by February 1986. In December 1987 the Hospice opened its Day Care Centre.

None of this would have happened without the army of volunteers who help the hospice to this day.

The Countess of Westmorland, President of the National Society for Cancer Relief, officially opened the Hospice on 5 December 1984.

It soon became apparent that we were outgrowing the present building and the vision of a new purpose built hospice started to emerge. Much thought went into the location and layout of the new building. The ideal site was found in Hindley, which was central to the area served by the Hospice.

During the planning stage we visited many hospices throughout the country. The ideas collected during these visits, together with our own experiences gained at Poolstock, enabled us to design a building most suited to our patients and their care.

A capital appeal was launched in 1994 by HRH the Duchess of York. This was successful in raising £1 million towards the new build project. However it soon became apparent that it would be extremely difficult to raise the whole of the original estimated building costs of £2 million within an acceptable time scale, if at all. During the time of the appeal we still needed to raise £600,000 per annum to maintain the services at Poolstock. In the end the total cost of the new Hospice was £2.6 million which was financed in part by a mortgage of £1.58 million. A bid for funding from the National Lottery at the time was unsuccessful.

The vision became reality in December 1997 when the new Hospice opened its doors.

To coincide with this the Hospice changed its name to "Wigan and Leigh Hospice".

The aims of the Hospice are to enhance the quality of life of individuals living with a life-threatening illness, to complement and support other palliative care providers, and to deliver needs-assessed research and education. With these aims in mind, the facility accommodates the following: -

12 bedded in-patient unit, with single rooms available

Day Hospice

Specialist Community nurse team (home care)

Complementary therapies

Bereavement and counselling

Out-patient clinic

Education, library and e-learning facilities

Physiotherapy

Occupational therapy

Reflection room (chapel)

Lounge areas

Private meeting rooms

Fundraising and Hospice Lottery

Administration and finance

The building is in pleasant surroundings with large garden areas and water features. All our patients have open views from their bedrooms onto the gardens.

In April 2007 the Hospice was honoured to welcome HRH the Duchess of Gloucester to officially open the newly completed annex and Day Hospice garden room. This project cost around £550,000 with £300,000 coming from the Big Lottery Fund, £60,000 from the local Primary Care Trust and £55,000 from the Mayor's Charity Appeal for 2006. The annex houses improved education, library and e-learning facilities together with offices. This has created space in the main hospice for the development of clinical services. The beautiful Day Hospice garden room looks out onto a private garden area for our patients enjoy.

In 2007 a further build project commenced with funding from the Department of Health Dignity in Care scheme. This work created more patient bedrooms, an overnight stay room for families, a beautiful conservatory-style lounge overlooking the hospice gardens and a Creative Arts Therapy centre. This grant also funded replacement floorcoverings throughout the Hospice. As part of this project the opportunity was taken to redecorate the in-patient rooms to maintain the high standards for our patients.

In 2010 a further bid to the Department of Health for capital funding to improve the patient experience was successful. This money is being used as follows:

- Extend existing car parking facilities
- Improvements to patient bedrooms and bathrooms
- Creative landscaping of hospice garden areas
- Enhancing the hospice chapel
- Improvement to the hospice reception
- Replacement of an ageing ambulance
- Provision of wireless internet facilities in patient and public areas

