

Highland Hospice is one of over 200 hospices or 'Specialist Palliative Care Units' in the UK that have developed since 1967.

Hospices have been places of refuge and for care for the sick since the Middle Ages but the modern hospice movement owes its development to the work of the late Dame Cicely Saunders and the opening of St Christopher's Hospice in London in 1967. Dame Cicely was keen to acknowledge this lineage when describing St. Christopher's:

*The name hospice 'a resting place for travelers or pilgrims', was chosen because this will be something between a hospital and a home, with the skills of one and the hospitality, warmth, and the time of the other.*

Palliative Care is the formal term used to describe the clinical specialty caring for those with advanced progressive and incurable illnesses. Although cure is not possible we aim to help palliate (*pallium*:latin 'to cloak') or moderate the various difficulties that are associated with living with such illnesses. This may involve anything from technical medical interventions for complex pain control, or, equally important for some people, a regular cup of coffee and a dedicated listening ear. Clearly there are many living in our community with incurable illness where the major part of their palliative care is provided excellently by their GP, community nurse, home carer and others and hospice care is not required.

Highland Hospice provides a potential resource for those individuals and their carers with complex needs which can't be met in their usual place of care. It is clear that to work effectively the Hospice has to join with mainstream NHS healthcare delivery and whilst we still do rely on charitable donation for the major part of our funding, this need is recognised by significant NHS Highland financial contributions.

The image of hospice as 'a place you go to die' has softened but perhaps only relatively recently. Whilst inpatient end-stage or terminal care is an important part of our work, it is certainly not the whole story. Highland Hospice is involved with ongoing care, sometimes over many months or years, in an out-patient and domiciliary setting as well as in hospital. Hospice is predominantly about living and enabling an individual living with life threatening illness, in the words of Dame Cicely Saunders, "to live at his/her own maximum potential, performing to the limits of his/her physical and mental capabilities, with control and independence wherever possible."

While we can clearly not relieve all the suffering associated with life-threatening illness we at Highland Hospice strive to provide the safety and security of highly trained clinical staff combined with an attitude of providing hospitality. We would concur with Dr Francis Peabody who, writing an essay entitled 'The care of the patient' in 1927 concluded that: "The secret of the care of the patient is in caring for the patient".