

Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

I had had very little direct experience of Islamic life when I was appointed Assistant Chaplain at University Hospital Lewisham in November 2010. I had always lived and worked in areas where Muslims were a tiny minority of the population. However, all that was to change, firstly by my coming to work in Lewisham and, secondly, by meeting Imam Shakeel Begg. Shakeel and I met in the Centre. He was so welcoming. We quickly became friends and, almost immediately, he became a Chaplaincy Volunteer with particular concern for Muslim patients.

Over the last three years Shakeel has been an invaluable source of information; somebody who I could go to for advice on Islamic issues. This was true when we were preparing to open *the Quiet Place*, our multi-faith room where Muslim staff can go to pray.

We have developed very strong links with the Lewisham Islamic Centre and earlier this year Shakeel invited a group of us to come over to the Centre to talk, to get to know each other and to be shown all that the Centre has to offer now and what the plans were for future. It was a very helpful meeting that I will never forget.

There is so much that we white, non-Muslim people have to learn about Islam to enable our country to continue to develop as a peaceful multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-faith nation; just as there is much to be learned –by all– about a complex, historic nation like the United Kingdom.

That is why welcoming, friendly, informative centres like the Lewisham Islamic Centre are so important to this country's future. As human beings and communities we need to be in touch with each other if we need to be informed. I am privileged to be associated with the Lewisham Islamic Centre.

The Reverend Malcolm Hancock, Trust Chaplain,

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