

A Few Wisely Led Are Better Than More Without A Head

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

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At the St Margaret's church, Parliament Square, memorial service for Baroness Warnock, we heard about the life of the mother of five who was one of the great and the good. She was head teacher of an Oxford high school before heading a Cambridge college.

Mary Warnock chaired the inquiry that led to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act. Her report on special education led to improved teaching for learning-disabled children and for the helpful 'statementing' system to gain special educational support. She provided advice on animal experimentation and on the questions of what Nazi loot should be returned to the families of original owners.

She has been an example of a person whose contributions span many fields that affect many of us in a variety of ways. She helped bring general if not unanimous consensus in several fields.

Locally, without embarrassing her, I want to give my understanding of what a leader can help to achieve by staying put. Dame Marianne Griffiths has this week been congratulated for inspiring and leading the Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, together with the Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust.

When Jeremy Hunt became Health Secretary he established the present ratings system. Worthing was the first hospital where he joined the cleaning staff before gathering with the management. He has congratulated Dame Marianne and all those with whom she works on the remarkable Outstanding achievement. Care Quality Commission inspectors have rated our hospitals as outstanding in the five critical areas: well led, safe, effective, caring and responsive.

Residents and readers may remember the alarm twenty years ago when St Richards and Worthing hospitals or their critical services appeared to be under threat. Tim Loughton MP, Tom Wye, Ron Noakes of the Hospitals League of Friends and many others across the community and the political parties came together. Tom's leadership and Tim's vital activity made it possible to survive and to thrive.

The way forward was to combine Chichester and Worthing with Southlands. When it was proposed that Chichester's Marianne Griffiths was to be appointed as chief executive across the board, a few asked me to protest; they feared a Chichester takeover. I declined. She was the right appointment.

Usually, a good effective public service boss moves on before the achievements during their time can prove to be temporary or lasting. Marianne and those who worked with her have stayed on. In addition, when Brighton were in a pickle, our leadership team took on the challenge there.

All has been well. All have gained. Let us thank everyone in our hospitals for working together. We know it has been tough. We know that when things go wrong, as they will on occasion, the Trust will be clear what happened and will try to put matters right.

There has been equivalent achievement in other fields. I am aware that I write infrequently about the successes of teamwork and leadership in the private sectors. Also, I have not often found it possible to put across the incredible dedication, professionalism and the individual initiatives in our Armed Services. I do attend frequent briefing off-the-record with senior military and I listen to senior Defence civil servants.

Sir Arthur Drew, the last permanent under-secretary at the War Office, made a lasting impression when I was young. He said a condition for promotion for any of his 'desk-warriors' was a month with an active service unit, preferably on active service. He said it gave them a sense of urgency and the need for effective action to achieve tasks with the available people and resources while recognising the contribution of each individual within the team.

During the next week, let us hope that Westminster will fix the EU UK stalemate. I will continue to be positive and cooperative.