



NHS Appoints Atheist to Serve as Head Chaplain as U.K. Becomes Increasingly Secularized

Great Britain has appointed the first-ever atheist to serve as a head chaplain at the National Health Service. The move underscores just how far the Brits have moved from Christianity.



The Daily Wire reports that Lindsay van Dijk, a self-proclaimed “humanist” who does not believe in God or an afterlife but believes that the meaning of life can be found by seeking happiness and helping others to do the same, will oversee three priests at the Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust.

Carolyn Morrice, the Trust’s chief nurse, contends that patients had requested more “emotional and spiritual support” that did not have ties to any particular faith.

“It wasn’t specifically about religious support, it was: ‘How can you support us when we’re feeling vulnerable?’” she explained. “Lindsay’s appointment confirms our commitment to provide a chaplaincy service with individual choice at its heart, catering to all our patients, visitors and staff regardless of faith, denomination or religion, including those who have no faith or religion.”

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Sadly, the decision has been well-received amongst citizens. According to the *Daily Mail*, the British Social Attitudes survey found that 53 percent of Britons had no religion.

And van Dijk’s beliefs seem to fit the bill for a population that is largely secular. “Anyone within the chaplaincy team goes to patients to lend a listening ear, to provide spiritual and emotional support, and doesn’t specifically say ‘I’m from this faith’ as it’s not important. We’re not there to proselytize our own beliefs,” she said. (She seems to be unknowingly describing the role of a psychologist, not a chaplain.)

Except, isn’t that the exact purpose of a chaplain? As noted by Rev. Malcolm Brown, the Church of England’s director of mission and public affairs, the chaplaincy is a “traditionally Christian concept.”

Beyond that, the health benefits of professional chaplains have been well documented in scientific [research](#), in fact, because of their spiritual and religious nature.

A meta-analysis of data from 42 published mortality studies, which included approximately 126,000 participants, found that people who reported frequent religious involvements were found to live longer than those who were infrequently involved. Another study of 600 older, severely ill patients found that those who sought a connection with God were less depressed and rated their quality of life as higher, regardless of the severity of their conditions. Perhaps most significantly, studies have demonstrated that spiritual well-being enables people to cope with painful feelings associated with illness, including anxiety and hopelessness. A 1992 study found that patients expect chaplains to help them with these feelings.



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on April 11, 2018

How exactly would van Dijk help patients struggling with illness to cope?

Van Dijk contends that she can still address patients' spiritual and emotional needs without religion. She told the U.K.'s *Guardian*, "A lot of people don't have an organized faith, but still have spiritual and emotional needs at difficult times. Often people are trying to make sense of their lives and the situations they find themselves in."

But despite van Dijk's flowery language, her appointment underscores the religious crisis that is taking place in the United Kingdom. Andrea Williams, chief executive of Christian Concern, notes, "Putting a humanist in charge of the chaplaincy team shows how far we have come from the Christian roots of the NHS."

Van Dijk's appointment is a symptom of a much broader problem taking place in the U.K. Earlier this year, three of the biggest evangelical Anglican groups announced that they would be working on a plan to address what they called a crisis of convictions in the Church of England and the nation's "rejection" of the Christian faith.

A September 2017 ComRes survey found that just six percent of British adults are practicing Christians, meaning they read the Bible, pray, and attend church regularly.

Reverend Rob Munro, chair of Fellowship of Word and Spirit, said in February, "At a time when our nation is rapidly rejecting its Christian inheritance, and the Church of England is in a crisis about its convictions and influence, there has never been a greater need for those committed to biblical truth to unite together, enabling our message to be heard with greater clarity and power. This isn't 'politics'; it is better living out the theological vision we proclaim, for the sake of the church and our nation."

Unfortunately, appointing humanist chaplains, an oxymoron, does little to resolve this crisis.



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