Building Review
Review of the Y Bwthyn Newydd Macmillan Specialist Palliative Care Unit on the Princess of Wales Hospital Campus, Bridgend

- **Design Features**
  A free standing building sited on the Princess of Wales Hospital campus provides a tranquil and dignified setting for specialist palliative care. Largely funded by Macmillan Cancer Relief, the layout is planned on Macmillan principles around a central ‘Green’ area conservatory with the patient accommodation on one long side and day care unit on the other. Landscaping within the green area and the recently extended garden, funded through donations and a grant from Help the hospice, provide informal setting/amenity areas that complement the building perfectly.

- **Client’s brief**
  Existing examples within the principality were less than inspirational and one overarching aim at Bridgend was to provide a calm, quality ambience in the building for the benefit of patients with life threatening illness, their visitors and staff.

- **Functional content**
  The development comprises an eight-bed ward (six singles and one double), offices and a day care support unit incorporating treatment and therapy areas as well as sitting, dining and quiet rooms for patients. The green area incorporates the main entrance and reception as well as a generously landscaped seating area.

- **Design and Construction**
  The parallel in-patient and day care blocks are of traditional construction with pitched tiled roofs and external finishes of brick and white rendered blockwork. The single storey enclosed conservatory allows good natural light generally and natural ventilation to those rooms around the perimeter. The pitched steel framed element finished white incorporating opening lights and blinds on one slope.

- **Timetable**
  - Building Project Completion Date: 17th January 1997
  - Building Occupation Date: 1st March 1997

- **Contract Value and Area**
  - £1,115,592.00
  - 947 m²

- **Credits**
  - Client: Bridgend & District NHS Trust (now Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust) in association with Macmillan Cancer Relief.
  - Architect: Estatecare/Capita
  - Landscape: Estatecare/Capita
  - Services Engineer: Estatecare/Capita
  - Quantity Surveyor: Estatecare/Capita
  - Structural Engineer: Clark Bond Partnership
  - Project Manager: Estatecare/Babtie Management
  - Main Contractor: Wallis Western Limited

The specialist palliative care team at Y Bwthyn Newydd works to provide expert care and advice to those with life threatening illness and their carers. There is a waiting list for beds and patients are normally admitted for two weeks. More younger patients are being referred for palliative assessment and care and 60% of patients are discharged at the end of their stay.

It is a building which, despite its planning and engineering shortcomings, succeeds to inspire those who come to it for palliative care. A chance meeting with the close friend of one who ended his days last year there proved the point emphatically. Unsolicited, he spoke in superlative terms about both the building and the care provided by its specialist team. When the clientele speaks like this, designers and carers must have got something substantially right.
Returning to Y Bwthyn Newydd exactly five years after it first opened proved to be informative. The same Macmillan Consultant and Clinical Nurse Specialist who were involved with the brief are still in post and running the Unit. Whilst acknowledging the overwhelmingly positive comments they receive from patients and visitors about the building, they were also keen to point out problems associated with its day to day use. Certain rooms had adopted different ancillary and office functions and the physiotherapy area had been adapted for chemotherapy clinics.

The central green area served a wide range of functions beyond reception and waiting. Certain treatments were administered to patients there, bereaved relatives were counselled and it served as a respite area and access to the garden for visitors and children during visits. Whilst its flexibility and amenity were unquestioned - one end is set aside for smokers - environmental control was inadequate on hot sunny days. The opening lights in the roof and half area blinds were insufficient even with supplementary mechanical ventilation.

Much of the Unit’s charm to an outsider derives from it being free standing with its own landscaped garden setting in the corner of the campus. The downside of the arrangement for staff is the isolation and lack of integration with other staff groups. This is an issue during breaks exacerbated by the lack of a staff room on the Unit.

One significant change externally was the high timber fence adjacent the main entrance, erected to screen hearse loading. It is unfortunate that the plan did not allow for access to the rear or side of the Unit. Extra fencing has also been erected to demarcate the grant funded extension to the garden.

Other significant difficulties with the plan include the narrowness of the single wards making it awkward to manoeuvre beds in and out and the en-suite wcs whose doors are too narrow for wheelchair access.

The heating system made the in-patient area very warm whilst the Day Care Unit – open four days a week – was generally too cold. One notable compliment from the users concerned the ample storage space for linen and other consumables.

It is hoped that with the adaptations completed, the Unit will function more effectively.

The building review was carried out by Phil Witcombe on behalf of Welsh Health Estates. Phil Witcombe is an Architect with many years experience in the health design sector.

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