

MISSION TO HELP THE SICK

More than 100 years ago, Mildmay Mission Hospital was set up to cope with an East End cholera epidemic. Today it is in the vanguard of the fight against AIDS. Ivor Watkins reports.

Sufferers of two quite separate illnesses have found a haven at the East End's Mildmay Mission Hospital.

The independent hospital in Hackney Road, Bethnal Green, may be relatively small by National Health standards, but today it is playing a big part in the fight against AIDS.

One hundred years ago its staff were equally effective in tackling cholera: the great killer that attacked unsuspecting victims through the water they drank.

There is still no cure for AIDS but skilled care makes it possible to treat and control many of the symptoms.

Growing numbers of afflicted people and their families are looking to Mildmay for help in retaining their self-respect, dignity and courage.

Princess Di

Among its supporters is Princess Di who said: "I admire it as a place which cares for emotional and spiritual needs as well as physical ones."

"Mildmay's approach is to treat those with AIDS as people with lives to lead, rather than as patients who have come to die." Five years ago it became Europe's first AIDS hospice, and now has 32 beds.



Ruth Sims - Mildmay's chief executive with a nursery officer in Mildmay's family care programme.

Then it broke new ground by opening a Family Care Centre to help families and children affected by HIV.

The whole approach of the Mildmay is patient-focused. When the patient arrives a comprehensive assessment is carried out in consultation both with them and those close to them. The aim is to set targets and aims. At the same time, the patient's religious beliefs are catered for through the Mildmay chaplaincy.

The care a person gets depends on the state and stage of their illness, too. They may be convalescent, in respite, long-term or terminally ill; they may be admitted several times as the disease progresses. Trust is the key, and patients have to feel comfortable spending

their final days or weeks at the centre.

Providing that care is the job of not just the medical and nursing staff but a whole team of people meeting the patients' needs.

Dr Veronica Moss, head of a team of five doctors, ensures that the centre provides an in-house 24-hour service to patients.

In the case of patients admitted for terminal care, the emphasis is on quality of life and ensuring comfort and dignity. Effective symptom control, with support for partners, friends and relatives are seen as priorities.

Nursing

The nursing team, supported by health care assistants, provide a 24-hour care service. Each patient prioritises their needs and receives an individual programme of care. The care plan is formulated following discussion with the patient after a three-day assessment period.

And medical care is only part of the Mildmay programme. Chaplaincy, counselling, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, social care, art therapy and dietary assessment and advice are all part of the service.

Families

Mildmay has a refreshingly-enlightened approach: encouraging families to remain together while one or other is getting treatment. There are 12 family rooms with bathrooms attached, as well as a nursery, cots, toys and private garden.

A separate Day Centre welcomes infected men and women who might otherwise feel alone and isolated. It opens on weekdays from 10am to 4pm; helping some to recover from illness and others to cope with personal difficulties.

Parents get a break there from caring for their children, and nursery officers look after youngsters up to the age of eight. Most people using the day centre attend once or twice a week and usually stay throughout the day.

History

And the cost? There's nothing for a patient to pay. It's met from Government funds as well as through a contract between the independent Christian hospital and the City and East London Health Authority.

The hospital's traditions have their roots in Cabbage Court, Bethnal Green, where the local vicar, the Rev William Pennefather, set up the Mildmay Medical Mission in 1866.

He was helped by a team of "mission ladies" who went into afflicted people's homes: nursing and consoling families when cholera



swept the borough.

Today, the hospital may have changed a good deal but, as Mildmay's business development manager, Carol-Anne Slater, says: "The hospital's traditional of caring has survived and grown with each generation."

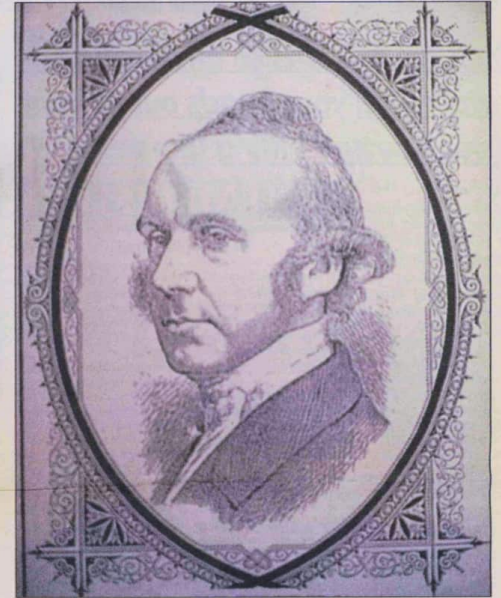
"We stand as ready as ever to help afflicted people in their hour of need."

A big part of their work today involves reaching out to help others in the fields of AIDS care and research. The Centre For Advanced Studies organises internationally recognised programmes and seminars for AIDS care professionals.

And new facilities are being planned, including an international

study centre and specialist consultancy outpatient clinics in Uganda.

If you feel you want to know more about Mildmay's services, or think its work may help enhance your life, the hospital invites you to ring and talk it over. Tel: 0171-739 2331.



Carol-Anne Slater (above left) business development manager of the Mildmay, pictured outside the centre; the Reverend William Pennefather (above) set up the Mildmay 130 years ago to combat the threat to the East End of the great cholera epidemic of 1866 - the faces change, and now there is a new enemy, AIDS, but the work of the hospital goes on as before.



The Reverend Nigel Schibild in Mildmay's chapel.



The reception area at Mildmay



The nursing staff are just part of a co-ordinated team which helps patients get the most out of the hospital.