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**PRESS RELEASE**

## **SECULAR ATTACK ON NHS CHAPLAINCY ‘SIMPLISTIC’, SAYS UNITE**

An attack by the National Secular Society (NSS) on the NHS chaplaincy service has been described as ‘erroneous and simplistic’ by Unite, the largest union in the country.

Unite, which embraces The College of Health Care Chaplains, called for more independent research and study, instead of the NSS’s ‘sweeping generalisations’ and calls for the end to funding

This follows the NSS’s demand today (Wednesday, 8 April) that religious groups fund their own presence in hospitals, thus saving an alleged £40m per year.

Unite outlined three ways that the chaplains ‘add value’ to the NHS.

- Having chaplains in hospitals means fully-stretched nurses, particularly at night, don’t have to balance the needs of bereaved families, when other patients need urgent care. Nurses know they can rely on the availability of a professional chaplain.
- If a patient dies and has no relatives, the NHS conducts the funeral (contract) services and having an NHS chaplain doing this means that the £100 legal fee for the service is not paid to an outside cleric – thus saving the NHS money. With the recession biting hard, there are an increasing number of contract funerals, as relatives can’t afford the funeral arrangements.
- Having a chaplain ‘embedded’ and ‘on call’ in the hospital ensures the highest professional standards when dealing with baby and child deaths, and for liaising with fellow healthcare professionals, as the NHS chaplain has more experience of the trauma that these deaths evoke in a hospital, than a faith leader coming in from the outside.

Unite also said that the NSS report seems to concentrate its fire on the Church of England, while the College of Health Care Chaplains has members from all the major faith groups.

Revd Dr Chris Swift, a former President of Unite/The College of Health Care Chaplains, said: ‘The NSS report is based on erroneous and simplistic assumptions that do not delve into the real work that chaplains from all faiths carry out in the NHS on daily basis in often emotionally fraught situations.’

