

## MY HOSPITAL HOLIDAY

I had a hospital stay recently. Nothing serious, but it took the better part of a week from familiar surroundings. I'm quite well now thank you, and somewhat enriched by the experience.

My last hospital holiday was over 30 years ago. I had little sense of what it would be like to become a cog in the hospital machine again, so decided to approach this as an unfolding adventure, to be observed, absorbed and noted.

It took the better part of day 1 to formally become a patient, starting at triage and registration desks with my GP's referral in hand, taken to a room for assessment to verify his analysis, agreement amongst duty doctors about treatment, and finally as the sun set I snuggled into bed #5B, tubed up and poised to go in the next day or two. Time enough to observe the 24 hour cycle of checking my vitals (asleep or not), short chats with doctors, and the handover routine when nurses changed shifts.

On reflection, two things struck me - the mesh of complexity and procedure I found myself in, and that there was choice but to trust and surrender to it.

Familiar to government workers, one way to deal with organisational complexity is to split into parts, manage them individually, and mesh it all back together into a coherent and reliable service organisation. Hospitals do the same I'm sure, but the difference is the degree to which the individual is at centre.

Imagine a hospital's organisation chart. You might think of a hierarchy of doctors, surgeons and nurses, and an extensive governance structure with the management that requires. True this may be, it's not the right answer.

A hospital's organisation chart is built around the patient. Patients create the complexity, each a unique person with a particular medical need and urgency. The "splitting into parts" here gears services (care and treatment) to a collection of unique needs.

In a sense, there is no 'community' of patients, just lots of individuals who, like me, surrendered autonomy and had trust that we'll receive personal attention from professional and caring people.

For good reasons, local governments tend to have a demographic-geographic approach to organising themselves and services, a sort of averaging of needs. In contrast, my hospital holiday was all about me. Not my neighbourhood, age, ethnicity, income or any other parameter. Just me.

So, this was a reminder that communities are nothing if not a collection of individuals, and that it's with each of us at centre where the organisation chart really begins.