

DAY 2: Chester le Street to Ferryhill

Passing 'Pity Me' village on way today, after another great send off, I could not help but wonder about the name- How did it come to be so named? My fellow walker explained the origin, and that it was a phonetic translation of the French Petit Mere! And we talked about other unusual place names like No Place, Once Brewed and Bearpark, and then we started talking about why we were marching. As it then turned out I had been talking to Alyson Learmonth, until two years Director of Public Health for Gateshead, and our paths had crossed in the past! and we started reminiscing and caught up on old friends and colleagues- what a great and pleasant surprise.

What was, however, not a surprise was that like myself and some other colleagues, Alyson was also marching to try and figure out how we ever get to this stage in the NHS? Surely as senior managers we could and should have done more/better to stop the rot. The loss of accountability and governance in the NHS has been a serious blow to our integrity and sense of fairness. I certainly feel guilty and marching is not only by way of an apology but also about trying to make things better for the future.

But then the question turns to but what could we have done, and was it really possible, given the widespread abuse of power- look at what happened with whistleblowers and no accountability for Mid-Staffs and other failures, and how did PFI ever get past the first base? Was it really possible for an individual to challenge and change things? And was not it ultimately down to values and how does one create and sustain good values, unless the system is organised to empower people and enable them to exercise them?

And we start going round in circles, but what everyone so far seems to agree on is the need to promote discussion and try for a cross party agreement on health services and find a way of holding the politicians accountable. But then what has been noticeable so far, mind you it is early days yet, has been the absence of politicians from the Coalition side to engage with the march. Plenty of Labour politicians including the Labour MEP, Jude Kortin-Darling and some reps from the Green Party but not Conservatives or Lib-Dems. I am told that invitations have been extended to all parties, and hope that as we progress down the route, we will see their participation. Otherwise, there is a danger of creating more polarisation, and I certainly do not want that.

What has been fascinating is the number of concerned people marching from not just the NHS, like Margaret, a retired consultant, but also teachers and my favourite today was the 77 years old painter and decorator who saw us marching and decided to join us, and indeed is going to bring his wife and the grandbairn for the next leg tomorrow.

Just to prove that I am the luckiest guy with so many caring friends, Mavis joined in again despite the dodgy ankle and Wendy arrived with a fantastic lunch – completely disrupting my diet plan! But very welcome and tasty- so thanks a lot.

And all the local mayors from surroundings areas turned up to receive us in Ferryhill, and there were stories of the original marchers who halted there in 1936, and indeed the local pub has a Jarrow beer called Red Ellen- named after Ellen Wilkinson, MP who was involved with the original march!



With Wendy and Mavis in Durham City



In the local pub, with the local vicar and the mayor

Rajan Madhok

17 August 2014

DECLARATION: I am walking in personal capacity and the views expressed are mine alone, and are meant to inform not criticise or insult. If you like them, tell others and if you do not, tell me- just kidding, but do help me with my prejudices/arrogance. I may be old but can still learn.

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