

Day 21: St Albans to Edmonton, and then to London

This is the final daily blog as tomorrow we march to London, and I will be ready for some rest and recreation! We did the St Albans to Edmonton leg today, and everyone is in great spirits and looking forward to the big rally in London tomorrow.

I am still surprised at myself for having made it, and also having stuck to the discipline of writing a daily blog – so there is hope for me yet!

I spent the march today taking stock, and thinking about where next for me.

It has been a fantastic experience- seeing the country, meeting people on the way, and spending time with the fellow marchers. They came from all walks of life and from all parts of the country, and indeed overseas. They were united by their love for the NHS, their commitment to looking after the vulnerable in society, and most importantly their determination not to be the ones who squandered their inheritance – they told stories of their parents and grandparents who had fought to create the welfare state- and wanted to pass this onto the future generations. Although already appreciative of the architects of the welfare state and of Nye Bevan for creating the NHS I admire them even more- it could not have been easy. That sort of political leadership is not much evident in the UK now.

This has been a people's march and as Rehana Azam said at each stage – this march is about serving notice to all politicians that they need to listen to the people, and not take them for granted. The people of the country want to be their brother's and sister's keepers, have a collective responsibility, create a civic society and they are prepared to fight for it.

I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to participate in this phenomenal march and so my thanks to the Darlomums, my fellow marchers, and all who joined us physically and in spirit.

What next is what has taxed me all along the way. Too many causes and too little time generally anyway? The focus of the march has been on privatisation and austerity but there are many things wrong with the system now – there has been little mention of quality/patient safety not to mention worker safety – with bullying and harassment and the treatment of whistleblowers; lip service is being paid to equality and diversity, and race equality remains a utopia; and our regulatory system seems broken, with neither professional nor systems regulators able to protect staff or patients, for example.

We need a new and reformed NHS and to my mind there are two basic, inviolable design features:

1. "It is the patient, stupid" – with the patient at the centre of the health and social care system
2. "Quality as the organising principle" with quality being used in its widest sense of patient safety, clinical effectiveness and patient experience, as Darzi review suggested.

Repealing the H & SC Act and the Reinstatement Bill, if (and I very much hope so) they come to pass, then there will still be a lot of work needed to create a fit for purpose 21st century NHS. And central to all this will be clinical engagement and leadership. I look forward to hearing from the medical and other professional bodies about how they see things, and to working on developing the necessary clinical leadership.

Also, having remained non-aligned politically all my life, I have begun to wonder whether this is right, and should I consider becoming a part of the political system by joining a party. I am going to seriously think about it in the next few weeks.

I suppose many of us had personal reasons for marching too – not quite the existential crisis but it has been useful for reflecting on life and to thinking about personal growth. According to Hindu tradition, there are four stages of life:

1. Bharmacharya (student life)
2. Grihastha (household life)
3. Vanaprastha (retired life) and
4. Sannyasa (renounced life)

I am in my Vanaprastha stage, and realised that I have a lot of unfinished personal business. I need to correct, if I can, things that went wrong and I need to get better as a person for the future. To some extent the march afforded the time to try and put into practice the best advice I have heard (translated from an Urdu couplet).

“With great difficulty I finally found peace

I forgave some and sought forgiveness from others”

I have certainly forgiven some, as I cannot afford to carry the baggage anymore, and I hope others will forgive me too. And that together we can move forward for the betterment of society, and for our own peace of mind.

I certainly feel a sense of peace, and I also feel tremendously energised – there are some really good people out there and there is a will and determination to change, and improve things - so Carpe Diem.

And most of all THANK YOU, THANK YOU for saving the NHS and for saving my soul.



The 300 mile feet



Setting off from St Albans



Too many causes



Reception in Edmonton

Rajan Madhok

5 September 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. Blogs available at www.leadershipforhealth.com