

PREFACE

This book is about the intricacy, complexity and uniqueness of every one of us. It is about the wonder of our personhood and the importance of recognising it both in health and in disease.

It is set in the healthcare context of 21st century life in Britain – a time of change and re-evaluation. Our welfare state has not fulfilled the dreams of its founders and our nation cannot afford to give everyone the care which they would like. Traditional values are being questioned and society's support structures are changing; we are living longer – often with long term health needs; and people are often fearful that amidst the financial pressure and numerous targets that our individuality will not be valued. However, it is in this turbulence that there is also an awareness of the resilience of the human spirit and the recognition of a quality of life which cannot be measured, or curtailed, by financial and material factors alone.

What do we mean by the concept of 'the human spirit'? How is the 'human spirit' relevant to our health – to the way we stay healthy; the way we cope with illness and disability; and the means by which we achieve greater health? Could it be that a greater understanding of our personhood, a greater recognition of the importance of the human spirit, could empower people to live fuller lives – where they are more able to care for themselves, positively engage with people around them and to be part of transforming their communities?

This book is about whole person care. The discussion about how human beings function, what whole person care means, and what research or evaluation has been done will be of interest to many. This, however, is not just a theoretical review of the subject matter. It is rooted in 25 years' experience of one General Practice which sought to express care for the whole person. Some may be inspired by the stories of transformed lives and changed relationships. It is hoped, however, that all who read this book will be challenged afresh to wonder at the uniqueness and interrelatedness of personhood and to honour that, as they have opportunity to care for people.