

Hospital superbug 'a factor' in eight deaths

DEADLY hospital superbug CPE was an 'associated factor' in eight hospital deaths, a review concluded.

A total of 196 patients tested positive for the bug at the University of Limerick Hospitals Group between February 2009 and May 2017.

Of these, 73 died while another patient who died was found to have MRSA, a different superbug.

Originally, experts linked 15 deaths to CPE but after a review, they could only agree that CPE might have played a 'possible' role in eight deaths, leaving a question mark over at least six others.

Reviews were set up last year

By Neil Michael
Southern Correspondent

after a whistleblower claimed 36 people had died after they became infected with CPE, which has a 50% mortality rate among anyone whose blood becomes infected with it.

Yesterday, Professor Paul Burke, chief clinical director of UL Hospitals Group, said the report concluded CPE was a factor in eight deaths, and insisted all of these patients had other 'significant medical problems'. For example, 28 had heart disease, 25 had respiratory problems, 17 had hypertension, and 11 had dementia.

In the report, he says: 'It is

understandable there has been much attention on this issue, particularly in the media, with suggestions patients may have been at increased risk because of its presence in our hospitals.

'Differing opinions will always exist between clinicians as to the relative contributions of different conditions to a patient's death in those who suffer from multiple medical problems. We believe our conclusions are reasonable.'

Prof. Burke said the hospital group's microbiologist Dr Nuala O'Connell found 14 cases in which she identified 'a possible association' with a superbug in the patients' death.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

The gentlest of men whose silence helped us to hear God

HE came into my life in the gentlest of ways. For that was the singular feature of Fr Eric Powell's character: gentleness. He was always there if you wanted him but would never intrude if you didn't.

Unbeknownst to me, he was chaplain at the school where my wife teaches. It was there, at a Christmas carol service many years ago, that I first heard him speak. In his quiet English accent, this gracious man blessed us in a way that I have never forgotten.

There was no fanfare, jokes or preamble of any kind. Fr Powell simply stood before the gathering and showed us what it is to be an icon of holiness. From that day to this, my admiration and esteem for him has never waned.

Back home in England, Eric Powell was educated by the Salvatorian Fathers. When he decided to join the priesthood, it was to them that he returned.

Then, in the early 1980s, the Salvatorians took over the parish of Sallynoggin in Dublin, and Fr Powell found his true home.

For 30 years, this mildest of men ministered to the people of Sallynoggin and Glenageary.

Many priests came and went, but he always remained. He was a quiet yet enduring presence in that parish, a man whose sole ambition was to give God to those whom he served.

Shortly after the carol service at my wife's school, I witnessed Fr Powell saying Mass in his parish church. He radiated a spiritual calmness that seemed to pervade the entire congregation. It was an experience of deep prayerfulness so rare in our world.

He was refined, reserved and possessed exquisite manners. And yet I never met a man more humble or unassuming. His life was a wonderful example of why it is the meek who shall inherit the earth.

It was already dusk when I entered the church one cold afternoon with my two older boys. It was dark and empty as we walked the long nave leading to the high altar. But then, we heard soft footsteps to the side of the church.

What we saw was something that had a profound impact on my boys.

There, all alone in the church that he loved, was Fr Powell strolling up and down by his confession box saying his rosary. 'Who is that?' asked our eldest, to which I replied: 'That is the perfect priest'.

I soon discovered that what we had seen was not at all unusual. Each afternoon, Fr Powell would spend an hour in the church simply making himself available. One day, I found him sitting with a deeply distressed young man. This tender man of mercy said very little, but it was obvious that all the young man needed was to be in his presence.

Eric Powell never said more than he had to, and never once did I hear him criticise another person. As he saw it, his job was to bring the consolation of Christ to anyone who sought it. That done, he would quietly withdraw without anyone noticing.

When, in 2011, I came to write my book 'Why be a Catholic?', it was Fr Powell that I used as the model of the ideal priest. In a world so devoid of spiritual heroism, people like him show us how to ascend to the better angels of our nature.

By living a humble life of simple service, and by treating all people with dignity and kindness, he proved that our true vocation here on earth is to help and heal.

Last Saturday, my dear friend Fr Eric Powell left this world after a short illness. He died as he had lived: quietly and without any trouble or fuss. This time, however, he shall not withdraw without anyone noticing.

FOR the story I told you today is that of a gentle saint who touched the lives of so many souls. That he did so without any fanfare or desire for recognition, was a true sign of his spiritual grandeur. He was living proof that the greatest in the Kingdom of God are those who are the servants of all.

Today, the church to which he gave so many years of life is in mourning. In the dark afternoons, it now stands empty and still.

But deep in the silence, you can still hear those familiar footsteps, still hear the sound of the holy priest in prayer.

His language was silence, which means that, if we listen, he will always be there.

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