

Reflections on the Manchester Pop Concert Bombing



As many ISPN members will know, Manchester, England is my home city. It forms a city-region (Greater Manchester) of almost 3 million people, a population that is diverse, friendly, witty, tolerant, stoical and innovative. I have been here for 35 years after arriving from a rural part of England in the early 1980s as a wide-eyed (and naïve) student and since then I have continued to be fascinated by, and proud of, this great city. Since I've been here for two-thirds of my life, I'd like to think I'm a Mancunian – if not born, at least adopted.

Manchester's symbol is the bee which reflects the hard work and industriousness of its past but, as you will soon realise, it is an apt symbol because bees are social creatures who work together collaboratively to promote and protect their hive.

Manchester is our hive and the solidarity of the diverse groups across the city-region in recent days shows we too will promote and protect our hive when attacked.

The horror of what happened on the night of Monday 22nd May has affected me like most people in our city-region and, indeed, most other places in the world. I don't need to say any more here: a pop concert attended largely by young people who had their whole futures in front of them. My decision to study in Manchester in the 1980s was to some extent driven by its place as cutting-edge city always at the forefront of music and it could easily have been me at 18 at a concert or gig in the city.

The effects have been a little bit more profound for me because I was in Manchester City Centre when the IRA bomb went off in 1996 (thankfully, there were no fatalities) and because some of our nursing students were on placement in our partner hospitals across Greater Manchester when casualties were received.

It is easy to become gloomy about this and while we should not underestimate the unimaginable grief that parents, families, friends, peers and colleagues might be experiencing, several things about humanity in the face of adversity have struck me.

Firstly, I go back to 1996. Large parts of Manchester City Centre were destroyed by a huge bomb left by Irish Republican terrorists. Manchester knew that an Irish Republican terrorist is not the same as someone Irish. We rebuilt, we have a great Irish community here and a fantastic Irish festival and St Patrick's Day parade every year. Secondly, I was touched by the concern shown by many ISPN members – I should say friends – who emailed to ask how I was. Finally, my department – Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work at the University of Manchester – has been receiving reports of the outstanding and selfless behaviour of our student nurses who were on placement at trauma centres at local hospitals receiving casualties. We would never have expected our students to be exposed to such a thankfully rare event nor would we necessarily have prepared them for it but they managed; indeed, they managed it well and we are extremely proud of them.

As psychiatric nurses, we're all aware of the value of 'people skills' in healing and recovery – talking, listening, feeling, reassuring, caring and even hugging (remember, I'm British!); in the last few days, I have been acutely reminded of just how powerful those people skills can be.

Steven Pryjmachuk, President-Elect, ISPN

25th May 2017