

# Head of London hospital quits after Catholic code is passed

LONDON - The head of a London Catholic hospital popular with celebrities quit his post following the adoption of a new code of ethics banning doctors from making abortion referrals and from handing out contraceptives and the morning-after pill.

Lord Bridgeman stepped down as chairman of the board of directors of the Hospital of St. John and St. Elizabeth after a board meeting Dec. 12. Lord Guthrie, the Catholic former head of the British armed forces, took his place.

Lord Bridgeman's resignation, confirmed in a Dec. 17 statement by the hospital, is the latest in a wave of resignations following the adoption of the code in November. He was unavailable for comment.

The revised code was ordered by Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor of Westminster after it emerged that the hospital had been flouting church teaching and permitted sex-change operations.

The code was to be implemented by the spring but some executives refused to approve it.

They argued that it would be unworkable, unpopular with staff and that it would cost the hospital valuable revenue because doctors who pay to use the premises would take their practices elsewhere.

The executives said it would be better for the hospital to abandon its Catholic constitution and for Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor to resign as patron.

But Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, refused and said in October that he wanted to turn it into a "flagship pro-life hospital" and "a sign of our convictions."

The code was then adopted by a majority vote at a private meeting in November, and in early December two directors - Dr. Martin Scurr and Lord Fitzalan-Howard - resigned in protest.

Dr. Scurr, in his letter of resignation to Lord Bridgeman, said that "the Catholic Church must withdraw from involvement in frontline health care here in the U.K., as it appears to be unable to reach the degree of tolerance that has been reached elsewhere in the world."

The hospital was founded by the Catholic Church in 1856 and was initially run by the Sisters of Mercy. In recent years, the hospital's maternity unit has become popular with celebrity mothers; model Kate Moss and actresses Cate Blanchett and Emma Thompson have given birth to children there.