

## A Sense of Unity

Last October I was diagnosed with breast cancer following a routine mammogram. In November 2008 I had a radical mastectomy and as I write this I am half-way through chemo-therapy. One Friday afternoon I was hearing routine matters in my Chambers and on the Tuesday I was in the operating theatre. As I tidied my Chambers before I departed it was with a sense of relief that I was aware that I was still going to be paid my full salary during my sick-leave.

It is an aid to the independence of the judiciary in England and Wales that our salaries are protected and if any member of the judiciary suffers serious illness there is no financial pressure to work because of fear of losing a salary. Further, such a situation must also aid diversity in the judiciary. It would be a disincentive to applicants for judicial appointments to apply if this protection to judicial pay did not exist in England and Wales. Judges have house-hold bills like everyone else. Some no doubt have large mortgages .Many have young children.

When I was tidying up in my Chambers I did not think too much about whether I would hear from my colleagues while I was away since not being in touch with other members of the judiciary seemed a little unreal. However, the support of the judiciary has been an enormous boost to my morale and very valuable to me. As a District Judge based in a London County Court I suppose I might have just expected cards or wishes from my immediate colleagues. The fact is I have received cards, gifts, telephone calls and messages from Judges all over the country.

The support and unity of the Women Judges of the UKAWJ has been particularly meaningful. Their support has been a constant over the last few months. It has been a striking fact that several women judges have told me that they have been in a similar position to me, some more recently than others, and I have been offered valuable advice. It is a sad fact of modern life that it appears that so many female judges are affected by breast cancer; however, if any good can come out of this unfortunate experience, it is recognition of the collegiate spirit of the judiciary, particularly the UKAWJ. We have an independent judiciary in the United Kingdom who from my experience are able to offer a united front of support and encouragement to a colleague in need. This is something which should be valued, and indeed nurtured. I have no personal knowledge of how a female judge with breast cancer would be treated in other countries, particularly in regimes where the role of women is seen rather differently than in this country .Further Judges in the United Kingdom are free to communicate with each other, and have a number of Associations which they are able to join without interference from the executive, for example the UKAWJ. I suspect that in some countries female judges would not only covet our judicial terms and conditions, but see our collegiate spirit as something to which they should aspire. I am proud to be a woman District Judge in the United Kingdom.

20.2.08 District Judge Stephenson