

The JC

Jewish Chronicle

FEBRUARY 13, 2004 ●

CHANGE OF HEART NEW END ❖❖❖

Here's a sentence you don't see very often — there are two organ transplant plays opening this week.

A writer friend once declared that drama is so much easier than comedy — all you have to do is kill a baby. There are no babies in Rosemary Freidman's play, but there is a sense that the author has chosen a subject that is almost gratuitously emotive.

The sub-plot focuses on Anna (the excellent Estelle Morgan), a bright adolescent girl whose lungs are decimated by disease. And while she fights for breath, her father fights to keep her at the top of the hospital's heart and lung transplant list.

Her rival is Friedman's heroine, 43-year-old Professor Jesse Sands (Julie-Kate Oliver), who by awful — and dramatically convenient — coincidence, runs the hospital's research facility specialising in the disease that is killing her.

And Friedman loads Argentinean surgeon Eduardo Cortes's (Gary Condes) life-and-death decision by giving him and Sands a past relationship. The romantic note is easily forgiven. Less so is Cortes's motive for choosing his profession — his experience of living under a dictatorship, which is surely not what drives most surgeons at Harefield.

But what elevates the play, and Michael Gielta's terrifically performed production, to something much more than your average hospital drama is the tension felt by Freidman's patients as they wait for an operation that could more easily kill than cure.

There's convincing insight, too, into the way a person's morality is recast while they or their loved ones edge closer to death. "Good news," declares Anna's father Jack (Clive Moore), whose daughter's transplant is dependent on someone else's death, "there's been a bad accident in Paddington — dozens of casualties."