

Certainties and questions



The comment by Stein Kaasa, President of the European Association for Palliative Care (EAPC), in the previous edition of the *European Journal of Palliative Care*, emphasised the development and spread of palliative care in Europe.

Yes, mentalities have changed. Yes, the management of pain and painful symptoms has seen remarkable progress. Yes, circulars and laws are carrying on the work of the pioneers. No, we will not go into reverse gear; that much is certain and we can rejoice.

But the end of life shakes us up, brings questions to the fore, and we should not be blinded by our sense of satisfaction. We have no right to soothe ourselves with illusions, to keep our eyes closed to the difficulties and the paradoxes, in particular the drift of the European palliative care movement.

The EAPC has the merit of existing and the EAPC is fortunate to be developing. But in the current stage of its evolution, it must take into account all of the voices that were struggling to be heard at the 8th Congress of the EAPC, held recently at The Hague. It must find a means of affirming its European identity and its intention to remain a multidisciplinary and multiprofessional association.

In 1997, at the 5th Congress of the EAPC in London, an appeal was made to come to the aid of economically underprivileged countries; a praiseworthy initiative, but one that has for a long time seen no concrete effects, or, more specifically, no notable actions in the field. And in the very rare cases in which backing was given, this only wore out those that had been naive enough to think that their action would become part of a chain reaction, whereas in fact they simply found themselves isolated and they evidently did not dare throw out the baby with the bath water.

The EAPC reacted by creating a specific programme – the EAPC co-ordination centre for Eastern Europe – to which Carl-Johan Fürst and Sylvia Sauter have dedicated themselves remarkably. However, let us not be under any illusions: ill people at the end of their lives in Eastern European countries will not have their suffering relieved by the advancement of ideas.

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To put it boldly: only financial support is able to create the appropriate structures needed to care for such patients, recruit the carers and supply the medication. Giving a starving person the recipe for bread is only meaningful if you also supply them with water, bread and flour ... the EAPC must take up this challenge. For such underprivileged countries, I do not think that the EAPC should finance them directly, rather it should create sponsorship opportunities between its members and existing structures or create them in these countries. The EAPC could play an essential role in organising these programmes, without incurring any costs.

A single language?

Palliative care loudly proclaims its support for multiprofessional and interdisciplinary work; but is it not nonsensical to impose a single language on care workers, nurses, psychologists, social workers and doctors, the great majority of whom can only really effectively communicate in their own language? The idea is not to promote one language over another but rather to ensure that access to the European palliative care movement is not restricted. It is obvious from the attendance figures from the last three congresses that there are choices to make, which include having a budget that allows for four official languages (English, French, Spanish and German – plus that of the organising country).

Did you know that there were only about 100 French attendees of whom half would not have come if they had not been invited by pharmaceutical companies – all expenses paid. If the current policy continues, future EAPC conferences will be reserved for an elite of doctors sponsored by pharmaceutical giants. The EAPC must remain democratic otherwise it will split up instead of uniting. It will serve as mere decoration instead of being of genuine service to patients at the end of their lives, which remains the only justification for its existence.

Growing up is a difficult process... Let us hope that the message is understood.



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