

Tributes to Dame Cicely Saunders

A life well lived

The recent death of Dame Cicely Saunders offers a chance for reflection on the immense contribution that her life's work has meant to medicine and healthcare at a global level.

Internationally recognised as the founder of the modern hospice movement, her vision for end-of-life care echoes her deep Christian ideals and respect for the innate humanity within each of us. In paying tribute to her lifetime's achievement, we are aware that the good care which is today commonplace throughout many countries was only possible through the determination and strength of one woman's mission.

Of course, palliative care has come to mean so much more than a Christian approach to care, although its roots growing from Dame Cicely's spiritual journey should not be forgotten. The modern clinical application of her caring philosophy moves beyond borders, creeds and politics. Today, palliative care provides a framework in which cure and care are finely tuned to meet the needs of people with a broad spectrum of advanced disease, offered in a multiplicity of ways, each reflecting a different cultural heritage, but aspiring to the principles she laid down in that first modern hospice, St Christopher's in England.

Palliative care in Europe owes a debt of gratitude to Dame Cicely for her unending support to the local initiatives which grew from first contacts with both St Christopher's Hospice and the lady herself. These became the seeds of the hospice movement in many European



Dame Cicely Saunders, 1918–2005

countries. In her own writings, one reads how these seeds were sown: letters of encouragement, answers to problems given, faith restored in a mission where difficult challenges existed. Dame Cicely Saunders provided that first beacon and others that today represent our own European story took it up. Her ongoing correspondence with the founding members of the European Association for Palliative Care and her closing address to the 1992 EAPC Congress in Belgium gave encouragement that their vision for a European network was justified and necessary. There are many others from all over Europe who have their own story who would acknowledge their special debt to her. We, in the EAPC, are part of that acknowledgement.

What is perhaps her greatest legacy is that she never claimed ownership of palliative care. Rather, she shared her vision with others and enabled them to adapt and create palliative care within the systems and structures that existed

within their respective countries. Her story of the development of St Christopher's Hospice is evidently one of triumph over adversity, a fundamental belief in the adage of the 12th Century English mystic, Julian of Norwich, that 'all shall be well'. Each country in Europe faced similar challenges in developing its palliative care service but her support gave the necessary encouragement that what they were doing was fundamentally right. It is equally commendable that her professional life and her experiences as a nurse, social worker and doctor could speak to a wide audience. But her message was always simple. Challenge ignorance and fear through sound clinical knowledge. Provide the evidence to support the benefits of good palliative care. Demonstrate the effectiveness of your care through good management and robust research. Watch carefully and guide safely.

Today we, the European Association for Palliative Care, represent almost 50,000 people from 31 countries who believe that patients with incurable disease can, in Dame Cicely's own view, 'Live until you die'. Being a part of the vision of palliative care means that we carry the legacy of David Tasma to Cicely Saunders – to provide a 'window' to offer light to the journey our patients must take. Each of us who will carry a personal memory of Dame Cicely Saunders will also carry that light to the next generation of palliative care practitioners for whom she will be a part of history. If we take the time to consider the gifts she has left us for the future, her spirit will continue to guide us and, in saying our sad farewell, we can thank her for a life well lived.

Phil Larkin, Vice-President of the EAPC

A personal note

It was with great sadness that I learnt that Dame Cicely Saunders had died. The palliative care movement has lost a mother of sorts, who was a role model, and always encouraged new initiatives within the field of palliative care, giving each the impression of being unique. She leaves throughout the world – no matter the cultural, religious or economic circumstances – hospices for caring and supporting terminally ill people. These places are themselves catalysts for the spread of palliative care.

The obituaries in different newspapers retrace the unusual professional career of this woman determined to put into practice her vision for caring for people at the end of life. Philip Larkin has written some thoughts on behalf of the EAPC and I would like to thank him for that.

I would also like to share with you a personal recollection; I met Dame Cicely at the two-day French conference held at St Christopher's hospice when she came to talk to the participants. That first meeting left a lasting impression because in her face there was lots of energy, because she was very attentive despite my laborious English, and this capacity to be open to others was a lesson for me. Every year, the palliative care course at Lyon university begins with the history of palliative care and the life of Cicely Saunders – this year we will be grieving.

Marilène Filbet, President of the EAPC

Annual general meeting of the EAPC

Following an invitation from the Executive Committee of the Irish Association for Palliative Care, we are pleased to announce that the 2006 European Association for Palliative Care Annual General Meeting (AGM) will take place in Dublin Castle, Dublin, Ireland on Thursday 20 April 2006.

The AGM will coincide with the annual 'Moving Points' conference held

by Our Lady's Hospice Harold's Cross on Thursday 20 and Friday 21 April 2006. The theme of the conference will be 'Palliative Care and the Older Person', which is an area of increasing clinical interest in Ireland. As many of the Board members have agreed to speak at the conference, it will provide an opportunity for Irish palliative care professionals to attend an international symposium with great scope for shared learning and for our international colleagues to learn something of the Irish approach to palliative care. We extend a warm welcome to our international colleagues and look forward to providing them with the warm hospitality for which Ireland is renowned.

For further information on the conference, please contact: The Department of Education and Research, Our Lady's Hospice, Harold's Cross, Dublin 6, Ireland. Tel: 00353 1 4068700.

Social workers meeting at the EAPC Congress, Aachen

At every EAPC conference, there is an opportunity to get together to share interests and concerns with colleagues from Europe. This year, we social workers, met in Aachen and it was a chance to renew old friendships and to meet new colleagues. During the meeting, several of us expressed our concerns about the dwindling number of specialist social workers in some European countries. There was anxiety about what was seen as a diminution of the role. It was suggested that it would be useful to collate articles specifically about the role and tasks of palliative care social workers. The aim is to be supportive and to start a discussion among ourselves about the future of palliative care social work. I am happy to receive references and then to distribute them to colleagues. In the UK, there is an organisation for palliative care social workers that has nearly 300 members and this was felt

to be extremely supportive to those who are very often in single-handed posts. However, this is the only national organisation of this type.

Please contact me with articles or research about palliative care social work. If you are working in this field, why not contribute an article to the *European Journal of Palliative Care* or *Palliative Medicine*? The 2007 congress is in Budapest – why not think about sending an abstract to celebrate our skills? In the meantime, please email me with references at: pam.firth@isabelhospice.org.uk

Pam Firth, Social Worker, UK

Connecting diversity – 10th EAPC Congress in Budapest

6–9 June 2007, Hungary

Buda and Pest, the two parts of the capital of Hungary, are divided by the River Danube, but we have nine bridges over the river that bring us together. With your participation, we can build a bridge for better palliative care.

The EAPC Congress is a good chance to show the creativity and diversity that exists across the whole of Western, Central and Eastern Europe. The Congress will also raise awareness among policy makers, physicians, other healthcare professionals and within the wider society, both on a national, regional and international level.

We would like to invite all of you to contribute to create a rich scientific programme. We believe that the scientific tradition of EAPC combined with the attractive city of Budapest will meet the interest of as many participants from the west as usual, but we also hope to welcome many new participants from the eastern countries.

We look forward to seeing you in Budapest in June 2007.

Carl Johan Fürst, Chair, Scientific Committee; Katalin Hegedus, Chair, Local Organising Committee