

International Collaboration in Palliative Care

In June 2001, a group of tutors from the Kent Institute of Medicine and Health Sciences at the University of Kent at Canterbury, UK, came to Zagreb to lead a course on palliative care. In Kent we have recently started a Master of Science course on Supportive and Palliative Care and two of the modules were presented in Croatia – symptom management and psychosocial care and bereavement. Palliative care is defined as “the active total care of patients whose disease is not responsive to curative treatment. Control of pain, of other symptoms, and of psychological, social, and spiritual problems is paramount. The goal of palliative care is the achievement of the best possible quality of life for patients and their families.” It also (a) affirms life and regards dying as a normal process, (b) neither hastens nor postpones death, (c) provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms, (d) integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care, and (e) offers a support system to help the family cope during the patient’s illness and in their own bereavement (1).

The course aimed to provide education in the basic elements of palliative care, using the experience of the tutors. It was well received by the twelve participants, who were involved in the development of palliative care in Croatia. It was both humbling and inspiring for the tutors to witness the dedication of the participants who attended the course on a voluntary basis, whereas we were all employed within hospices in the UK, with clear roles within the specialty of palliative care. The participants were able to gain more information and skills in palliative care and benefit from learning in a multidisciplinary group. The aim of the course was to encourage involvement in the teaching, including discussions about patients and families, and interactive activities, such as sculpting family situations. There was the opportunity to learn not only the facts, but to apply theory to practice as case studies were presented and discussed, showing the benefits of a team approach and the use of interactive methods of education.

The enthusiasm of the participants augurs well for the development of palliative care in Croatia. The start of the movement has begun, mainly due to the enthusiasm and hard work of Professor Anica Jušić. This course aimed to encourage these developments and to help the new ideas and attitudes toward palliative care throughout the medical, nursing, and social care systems of Croatia. A care system should not be imposed from elsewhere, but the ideas and impetus for development come from Croatian medical professionals, since the plans to be implemented need to be feasible in Croatia. The Kent Institute of Medicine and Health Sciences at the University of Kent at Canterbury hopes to continue the collaboration with the developing palliative care services, and hopefully with other health and social care professionals, both in training and after qualification. This Croatia-UK collaboration aims to improve the care of people with advancing disease so that their care and quality of life can be improved.

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1 World Health Organization. Cancer pain relief and palliative care Report of a WHO Expert Committee. Geneva: WHO; 1990.