

commentary

5th Symposium on hospice and palliative care - 10 years since the beginning of the organized hospice movement in Croatia (Zagreb, October 14-16, 2004): What have we done until now and how to proceed further?

Public and organized warning of the problems related to terminal patients started in 1989 during the English Workshop on amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, held in clinical hospital Rebro, Zagreb (Croatia). The problem was even more emphasized a year later, during the 4th Yugoslav symposium on neuromuscular diseases, under the title Medicolegal aspects of fatal chronic neuromuscular diseases. In 1994, Ms. Anica Jušić continued the elaboration of this actual topic by organizing the First symposium on hospice and palliative care, and later during the same year by establishing the Croatian society for hospice and palliative care within the Croatian Medical Association (CMA). Ten years have passed since we started struggling heavily for the acceptance by the public opinion and health professionals. With the 5th Symposium we tried to arouse wide-ranging interest and help the solution of the problems that can be solved, in spite of competing information on difficult existential problems. The guest speakers at the Symposium were from England; more than 200 participants, mainly physicians, attended the meeting, including the audience from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Bulgaria. We had the honor to have the Symposium held under the auspices of the vice-president of the government Ms. Jadranka Kosor, who followed up the introductory lectures with obvious interest. In her addressing she gave the words of encouragement for the continuation of already initiated actions and expressed her wish to join the organization as a volunteer. Mr. Nigel Sykes again, like ten years ago, opened the official program of the symposium. In 1994 he was a delegate of Cicely Saunders, the founder of modern world hospice movement; on this occasion he came in the capacity of the medical director of St. Christopher's Hospice, which was founded by Cicely Sanders in 1967. In his speech he stressed: "We ought to pay the same attention to those leaving the life, as to those entering it. It can be achieved".

The second day of the Symposium was focused on the current world trends in palliative care and the summary of the results achieved in Croatia. The first two sessions covered the topic titled Implementation of the palliative care into the existing healthcare system. Mr. Michael Wright from the International observatory of end-of-life issues, (Lancaster, England), spoke about the development of palliative care in the world. Ms. Anica Jušić spoke about Regional hospice center founded in Zagreb in 2002 under the moral support of the Ministry of health and owned by the logistics of Croatian association of hospice friends. The center of interdisciplinary hospice home-care visits is its main unit. Team members, although healthcare professionals are acting as volunteers. However, the time has come to change this voluntary activity into the full-time employment status. The basis for this transformation was presented by Mr. Stjepan Krajačić. The most important result achieved by the Committee for palliative care of the Ministry of health, which was founded in 2002, was the inclusion of the article 81 in the new Healthcare protection law. It implements the possibility of founding independent institutions for palliative care, such as home-care visit centers, outpatient departments for pain treatment and palliative care, and day-care centers. These centers should be run by the healthcare professionals, specially trained for accompanying the dying persons. Egidio Čepulić, the president of the Croatian association of hospice friends spoke about the Recommendations of the Committee of the ministers of the state members of the Council of Europe, which were issued in 2003. Croatian translation of

these recommendations was edited by the Croatian society for hospice and palliative care, CMA. Among other things the recommendations point out that palliative care is an integral part of the healthcare system and an essential element of civil rights to health protection. It is the responsibility of a government to guarantee the palliative care and make it accessible to anyone in need of it. The first practical results achieved in Croatia were presented during the next session. Details of interdisciplinary palliative home-care visits were presented by means of case reports, statistical data, and presentation of weekly meetings and consultations of healthcare professionals and administration. Ms. Žarka Zalar gave a report from Koprivnica, which was an example of the transition from education to practice based on the defining of the activities of "discharge nurse". The new profile nurse coordinates all events in the hospital with all that may happen at home of a patient with serious health condition or terminal patient. The afternoon sessions dealt with education in palliative care. The first one was related the teaching in English language presented by the interactive group led by Mr. David Oliver from the University of Kent. Thanks to network this possibility is now available not only in Zagreb but also in Koprivnica, Rijeka, Dubrovnik, and Varaždin. Mr. David Oliver has been elected as a visiting professor by the Education and scientific council of the Medical Faculty Zagreb. His first lecture for English speaking students was held in June 2004. Ms. Anica Jušić spoke about a great number of conferences, workshops, symposia, and single lectures held mainly in Zagreb but also in some other Croatian towns. The guests from England, USA, Sweden, Germany, and Poland were lecturing on these meetings. Many of hospice society members attended education courses for one or more weeks in England, Poland, and USA. Seven books have been published so far and the journal Bilten has been issued for five years, increasing its volume to more than 40 pages and many illustrations. A web site: www.hospicij-hrvatska.hr has been opened and over fifty articles have been published in journals and medical textbooks. Ms. Marijana Persoli-Gudelj spoke education in algology supported by pharmaceutical industry and about the activities of Croatian pain treatment society, CMA. Ms. Višnja Majerić-Kogler and Milica Katić spoke about regular postgraduate courses on pain treatment in malignant diseases and the most recent one dedicated to primary care/family medicine physicians. For more than three years Štefanija Ozimec has been giving optional lectures in palliative care to a number of students at the High healthcare school in Zagreb. Ms. Vlasta Vučevac presented a new initiative for education of the personnel in Homes for elderly and incapacitated (former homes for retired people). Numerous courses and conferences for volunteers dealing with bereavement were described. The first hospice research project in Croatia - What is meant by "good death" - was presented also. A special interest was aroused by a structured discussion on the subject titled "Seven major sins", which elaborated the most frequent mistakes physicians make in prescribing analgesics, especially opioids. Three topics basic for palliative care activities were discussed during the third day of the Symposium: "Futile treatment" which should be stopped and replaced with palliative treatment exclusively; "Family as a palliative care unit" - after the introductory lectures the topic was elaborated and discussed in five groups; the conclusions were made at the meeting of the group leaders and Ms. Ruža Andlar, a coordinator. "Spirituality in solving the end of life issues" was also a very successful session. The introductory lecture was given by Mr. Michael Wright from Lancaster. Final presentation about "Neurolingistic psychotherapy and bereavement" given by Ms. Melita Stipančić was equally well accepted.

The fundamental conclusion of the Symposium was that it was one of the most successful actions of the hospice movement in Croatia. We expect the Symposium will speed up the concrete solution for continued existence of the movement - the establishment of palliative care units of highest quality with full-time employed professionals in according to current Health protection law and its future amendments.

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