

Blog from Pam Firth. APCSW member and Joint Chair of the EAPC task force on Palliative Care Social Work

Nearly 3000 delegates from 60 countries gathered in Madrid, Spain, for the opening of the 15th World Congress of the European Association for Palliative Care (EAPC) on May 18.

The theme was: Progressing Palliative Care, and it reflects the growing recognition of the importance of palliative care in Europe and around the world.

The first EAPC congress I attended was in London and took place just after Princess Diana died. The day hospice I worked for bought one ticket/registration and we shared it between myself and the Macmillan team half a day each but. I was lucky enough to go for the whole of the first day. As we were in Westminster Hall many people took time out to visit the funeral flowers at Kensington Palace.

I remember being amazed that Frances Sheldon, the first UK social worker EAPC board member and joint organizer of the conference, got the audience of a 1000 people to introduce themselves to their neighbors. In those days, it was mainly social workers who trained interactively and to do this at the beginning was bold. Dame Cecily Saunders was there and surrounded by autograph hunters.

Since that congress, I have attended every biannual congress, for eight years as a board member of the EAPC and latterly representing a research team at Southampton University So, lots of lovely memories and this year it was great to catch up with colleagues and friends from all over the world

David Oliviere followed Frances Sheldon as a board member and was on the board for four years. He and I arranged the first meeting for social workers at the conference in Geneva. It consisted of David myself Sean Hughes and a Dutch, Swedish and German Social Worker. We have come a long way since then. A task force was formed and Sean, David and I wrote a white paper which was published by the EAPC in 2013/4.

This year the task force made a successful bid to run a parallel session on palliative care social work. We were thrilled to ask three social workers from across Europe to present papers. The first paper presented by Carla Reigada from Portugal was looking at the Barriers and Opportunities to implement Social Work practices in Europe. Inger Benkel from Sweden spoke about her doctorate research on Parents Experience of When an Adult Child is Seriously Ill. Sally Paul was the last speaker to an audience of over 100 people. She presented a paper Developing Capacity in End of Life and Bereavement Care in Hospices and Schools. This was followed by a wide-ranging discussion.

The task force will be presenting the end results of the survey of the roles of palliative care social workers in Europe but Dr. Maria Wasner presented the interim findings.

I want to conclude with some general observations about the congress the number of delegates has increased in the last two years. There were many people from South America because of the links with Spain. There were less sessions focusing on practical nursing issues such as constipation and more about disenfranchised groups such as the homeless, LGBT issues and palliative care for people with a learning disability and migrants. I heard much more about social issues but sadly not many research papers from social workers. It was good to see posters from Marie Price Nicola Holdcroft and several from the team in Brasov Romania. I was pleased to meet the only French palliative care social worker who completed our survey.

The congress was friendly well organized and the venue was interesting particularly as part of it was a giant car supermarket. It was lovely to be in Madrid and to have a chance to visit some major pieces of art such Picasso's Guernica

I hope that other social workers will send in abstracts for the 16th World congress in Berlin in 2019 Always happy to help with the construction.