Volunteers at the Heart of Hospice and Palliative Care – Opportunities and Challenges 2030

Over 300 delegates from countries across Europe took part in an International Symposium at the European Association for Palliative Care 16th World Congress in Berlin on 25 May 2019. With a varied programme, which included highly respected international speakers, this was an exciting opportunity to learn, share experiences and consider the opportunities for volunteering in the future.

The aims of the day were to:

• promote the international development of volunteering in hospice and palliative care
• raise awareness and understanding of volunteering in hospice and palliative care
• share knowledge, experiences and ideas at an international level.

Delegates were welcomed to the day by Mrs. Hartwig from the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Germany who very kindly provided the majority of funding for the event. Also part of the welcome committee were Professor Christoph Ostgathe, President of EAPC, Professor Lukas Radbruch, President of German Association for Palliative Medicine, Waltraud Klasnic, President of Hospice Austria, Anja Schneider, Vice President of German Hospice and Palliative Care Association and Leena Pelttari and Ros Scott Co-Chairs of EAPC Task Force for Volunteering on Hospice and Palliative Care in Europe. The conference was organised by a partnership with Hospice Austria – the national organisation for Hospice and Palliative Care in Austria and the German Association for Palliative Medicine.

The day began with a keynote presentation from Dr. Rajagopal, considered to be the founding father of palliative care in India. He gave a moving and insightful presentation on Compassionate Communities in Kerala, India and the vital role played by volunteers in hospice and palliative care. He spoke of the importance of the community in supporting people with palliative and end of life care needs and the importance of the “love and humanity” that volunteers bring.

Fatia Kiyange from The African Palliative Care Association then gave an overview of hospice and palliative care in Africa. She highlighted the significant problem of HIV and mortality, which required the significant involvement of volunteers. She also noted that the volunteers themselves are often very poor and a small payment may be offered to enable them to volunteer.

Anja Schneider followed, presenting the results of a research study, which explored Volunteering/Civic Engagement in Germany.

At the EAPC World Congress, the latest edition of the EAPC Atlas of Palliative Care in Europe 2019 had been launched. For the first time, a chapter on volunteering was included and Carla Reigada, from the EAPC Atlas research team gave an overview of the development and content of the Volunteering Chapter.

These presentations were followed by a session on “My Volunteering Life”, a series of short presentations from volunteers from different countries giving an insight into their experiences of volunteering in hospice and palliative care.

A further discussion panel explored how hospice and palliative care volunteering was
changing and included representatives from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Serbia, Spain, and the UK.

After an excellent lunch and time to read the many posters about volunteering in different countries, Ros Scott and Leena Pelttari gave a joint presentation on "Voice of Volunteering" the EAPC Madrid Charter on Volunteering in Hospice and Palliative Care. They gave a brief overview of the aims of the Charter and the initial findings from a survey exploring its impact.

The final part of the day was spent in a World Café session full of lively and interesting discussions. These covered a range of topics including the training of volunteers, the training of volunteer coordinators, quality programs and frameworks for volunteering, changes and challenges in volunteering, "Being there", volunteers and society and the future of volunteering.

It was an excellent day and delegates left with much to think about and take back to their organisations and countries.