

## APPG notes for 9.11.15

When considering the arts in relation to palliative care, the three aspects that came to my mind were their role in 'therapy', in education - to help professionals to develop the relational aspects of caregiving - and in creating a healing environment, themes that have already been touched on. The unifying theme for me is 'healing' and it is to this subject that I will offer my three minutes, rather than deal with these three aspects separately.

To those here it will be stating the obvious to say that in palliative care our role is not to cure disease but to heal our patients, recognising that it is possible to die healed. Healing, is at the heart of our work. Yet healing is a word that has all but disappeared from the lexicon of modern health care, appropriated, some might say misappropriated, by practitioners of complementary and alternative medicine. One reason is that healing is difficult to define. As Cassell says, 'So much is written about healing and yet what it is remains unclear'. All the more reason for talking about it today.

What we can say is that it deals with addressing the subjectivity of human suffering and facilitating a process of inner change or adjustment. It is therefore not about the technological 'doing to' of the disease orientated model of healthcare, but of being with, bearing witness and encouraging the expression of subjective experience. Herein lies its link with the arts. For the arts are about expression, about subjectivity, about point of view, about creating meaning, whether this achieved through a visual form, with music or with poetry or narrative. In the same way that apprehending a work of art can be challenging, so it might be often be uncomfortable to witness the suffering of others. But as practitioners we can develop our sensitivities and sensibilities with the arts to develop our empathy and compassion, for example.

To foster these relational aspects of care we need the right conditions, a healing environment, in which healing relationships can flourish. And when we consider the healing environment this can refer to both the physical surroundings - peace, calm, the presence of artworks, for example, the inner world of the patient and the characteristics of the healer. A healing relationship is not about problem solving but active listening and empowerment. The instrument of healing is thus the relationship between healer and patient. Sometimes this 'gift exchange', to borrow a term from anthropology, may involve a prescription or a procedure, but it can be an artistic or creative process, giving form to the healer's art.