

Symposium on Ethics and Palliative Medicine

Organized by the Croatian Catholic Medical Society a Symposium *Ethics and Palliative Medicine* was held on 7 November at the University of Zagreb School of Medicine. The name of the symposium itself implies a link between science and humanity in the framework of moral values and with the aim of the quality of human life from its beginning until death.

According to the Croatian Medical Chamber's *Code of Medical Ethics and Deontology* one of the most significant characteristics of medical vocation is help and care for the patient, particularly the one who is gravely ill and dying. Certainly, the contribution and alleviating circumstances of this kind of help is the result of advancement of both medical and pharmaceutical scientific achievements. Until the mid 20th century, these sciences had been relatively limited in suppressing pain and symptoms control. The advancement in medicinal therapies in the 1950s, combined with growing understanding of psychosocial and spiritual needs of the dying, paved the way for the development of the palliative/hospice care.

Founded and proven model of palliative care/medicine at life's end is hospice care. It begins when classic (curative) methods of treatment have been exhausted or when the symptoms of spreading of malignant disease have reached the level where the patient stands it with great difficulty.

The primary goal of curative medicine is healing, and death is its last failure. On the contrary, the goal of palliative medicine is to alleviate suffering and the death, which occurs after alleviating patient's suffering, is a success. Palliative medicine is much deeper than pure symptomatology. The term implies holistic approach to the patient, which includes not only physical dimension, but also his or her psychological, social and spiritual engagement.

Holistic approach was the characteristic of lectures at the symposium and lecturers included physicians: Morana Brkljačić Žagrović, Ph.D., Marijana Braš, Ph.D., Matija Rimac, Vlasta Vučevac, Jasminka Stepan Giljević, Ph.D., and Zoran Lončar; then Kristina Vokić, graduate nurse and theologists: professor Mijo Nikić, Ph.D., and bishop, professor Valentin Pozaić, Ph.D.

The final thought of professor Pozaić is at the same time the most appropriate conclusion and message of this symposium: Both in Croatia and worldwide, the main problem of imposing and requiring euthanasia is not theoretical but practical in nature, so a practical and theoretical answer must be sought, and that is the hospice as one of the most beautiful, most humane and most creative initiatives in the fight against euthanasia. The act of dying shall be transformed to evil if the euthanasia mentality prevails – the culture of death; and it will be transformed to good if the hospice mentality and the palliative care/medicine prevails – the culture of life.

Morana Brkljačić Žagrović