

**All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care (AIHPC) International
Education and Practice Fellowship 2013**

Report: Dr Paul D'Alton Senior Clinical Psychologist / Head and Clinical Lead of
Psycho-oncology Department, St. Vincent's University Hospital

Location: Upaya Zen Centre, New Mexico, USA,

Overview of aims and purpose of visit:

The Upaya Zen Centre, New Mexico, USA, specializes in training health care professionals in end-of-life care. The Upaya Zen Centre has delivered a teaching programme called 'Being with Dying' for 25 years which is designed and delivered by Joan Halifax PhD. Joan Halifax is a Zen priest and anthropologist who serves on the faculty of Columbia University and the University of Miami School of Medicine. For four decades, she has worked with dying people and lectured on the subject at Harvard Medical & Divinity Schools. The 'Being with Dying' training programme integrates Eastern and Western approaches to dealing with death through application of contemplative practices in the context of end-of-life care for health care professionals. This approach is presented as an antidote to what Halifax describes as the fear-bound American version of the 'good death' – a death that is often life-denying, antiseptic, drugged-up, tube-entangled and institutionalized.

The literature clearly illustrates that one of our greatest challenges in death and dying is simply *being with dying* at an emotional level. In my own role as a clinical psychologist, teacher and mentor, the single most prevalent issue for HCP in dealing with death is an internal / emotional one. This training program provided me with practical, applicable skills and tools for use directly in my clinical work and importantly in my work teaching and training future health care professionals to bring about greater competence in dealing with death and dying.

Objectives developed prior to visit:

The 'Being with Dying' programme provided me with a multitude of skills to support the cultural shift required to provide excellence in palliative and end-of-life care in Ireland. I believe strongly that palliative care is hindered by a hesitancy or lack of acceptance regarding death; both on behalf of clinical staff and patients. I affirm that only by adequately training and supporting clinical staff to face their own internal challenges concerning death can we openly and freely discuss death and palliative issues with patients, and improve our service provision of meeting their palliative needs and the needs of family members. I believe that dealing with these issues is imperative to improving our service, especially in light of time pressure commonly associated with palliative care provision. The training program addresses death, grieving and communications regarding death, as well as tools for fostering a culture of self-care, resilience and community in the care setting. Having learned these skills I will disseminate thorough my role as clinician, teacher, researcher and leader in oncology and palliative care in Ireland.

Outcomes achieved as a result of the visit:

Training in core issues related to dying, death, and grieving; ethical issues in end-of-life care and training in the communication of difficult news; community building around dying persons and relationship-centered care; the neuroscience of contemplative practice applied to end of life care, self care and resilience training; approaches to psychological and spiritual care of the

dying; the relationship between pain and suffering; peri-death phenomena; and care of the caregiver.

Outputs:

At a local level I have scheduled a seminar on 'Being With Dying' for October 2014.

I will deliver a similar seminar to the Psychological Society of Ireland's Special Interest Group in Loss, Death & Bereavement in November 2014.

I have a considerable teaching commitment in UCD and TCD with health care professionals (medical and non-medical) and my teaching has been highly influenced by my training at the Upaya Institute.