

Zbigniew Żylicz¹, Małgorzata Krajnik²

¹Emeritus professor, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

²Department of Palliative Care, Collegium Medicum in Bydgoszcz, Nicolaus Copernicus University of Torun, Bydgoszcz, Poland

To the memory of Robert Geoffrey Twycross 1941–2024

On the evening of the 20th of October, at home, surrounded by his family, Robert passed away at the age of 83. He was one of the most inspiring clinical teachers we ever met. For many years, he was our mentor. He was always interested in what we were doing and what we were writing. Sometimes, we were writing something together, using his profound knowledge and experience in editing. He was somebody who was always learning, usually by writing.

One of us (Zbigniew Żylicz) met him for the first time in 1988, in Milan, Italy, at the first “unofficial” European Congress on Palliative Care. The other one of us (Małgorzata Krajnik) met Robert a couple of years later. After this Congress, the attendees founded the European Association of Palliative Care (EAPC). I (Zbigniew Żylicz) eagerly sought Robert to get acquainted with him. The idea was to invite Him to Poland to help develop palliative care there. And Robert agreed to this immediately and with great enthusiasm. Afterward, he visited Poland many times and inspired many doctors and nurses, among them us, to commit ourselves to a career in palliative care. Robert frequently invited us to participate in his courses at Oxford. It was his way to keep in contact with us. Initially, we were invited as students, but later, as speakers and members of expert groups, he was leading. There were fascinating discussions on pain and opioids, nausea and vomiting, pruritus, and many more.

After each such meeting, participants wrote a paper on the subject and presented a state-of-the-art paper that was published. Once, we were both intrigued by a patient in my (Zbigniew Żylicz) Dutch hospice, Rozenheuvel, who was suffering from severe itch and tried to commit suicide because of this. He responded to paroxetine given to him in anticipation of psychological depression. To our surprise, the patient responded to this treatment with a complete remission of the itch. When we shared this with Robert, he suggested collecting more similar cases and later doing a clinical trial. Robert spiked our interest in itch for many years. At a particular moment, we proposed Robert writing a textbook on itch. He then confessed that all his knowledge on this subject could be summarized in half a page. Despite this, he agreed to work on the textbook. He organized a meeting of renowned experts in Oxford to learn more about the subject. The Conference, again, resulted in a state-of-the-art paper, best-cited ever, and a book written by the experts and edited by us.

Of course, he was mentoring many more doctors worldwide, including India, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Russia, and Ukraine. He had unbelievable and inexhaustible energy for traveling and lecturing. Students and listeners were giving him power. They were winding him up. One of the most exciting journeys was to Chengdu, China in 2005. We were

Address for correspondence:

Zbigniew Żylicz
Nijmegen, The Netherlands
e-mail: bezyna55@gmail.com



Palliative Medicine in Practice 2024; 18, 4, 259–261
Copyright © 2024 Via Medica, ISSN 2545–0425, e-ISSN 2545–1359
DOI: 10.5603/pmp.103667

Received: 20.11.2024 Accepted: 22.11.2024 Early publication date: 5.12.2024

This article is available in open access under Creative Common Attribution-Non-Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license, allowing to download articles and share them with others as long as they credit the authors and the publisher, but without permission to change them in any way or use them commercially.



Figure 1. Walking through the Oxford fields — Deirdre Twycross, Robert Twycross and Małgorzata Krajnik



Figure 3. Tour of the Tatra mountains in Poland



Figure 2. Tour of the Tatra mountains in Poland — from right: Robert Twycross and Małgorzata Krajnik with two other course attendees



Figure 4. Tour of the Tatra mountains in Poland. On the foreground Michael Minton and Robert Twycross

teaching (Zbigniew Żylicz), with Robert as lead, a group of 250 palliative care physicians for a couple of days. Exhausting, but certainly rewarding.

We visited Oxford frequently, staying sometimes at His home in Headington, Oxford, welcomed by Robert and Deirdre. In 1994, I (Zbigniew Żylicz) opened a new hospice, Rozenheuvel, in the Netherlands. Although I was rather experienced as an internist in hospital medicine, I sometimes needed to call Robert and chat with him about my dilemmas and complex patients. He was always willing to help and to discuss, which was enormously helpful in a country (the Netherlands) just beginning to get interested in palliative care.

At a particular moment, from Roberts' students, we became teachers to others in our countries. We copied a lot from Robert's style of teaching. We shall always remember how Robert inspired us and helped us to develop our interests for the benefit of others. We shall miss him.

At the end, we want to share some photos of Robert showing Him in the different roles he played: as a mentor, teacher, and spiritual man who trusts God and contemplates life. I (Małgorzata Krajnik) will always remember those walks through the Oxford fields while Robert asked me about my work and different problems (Fig. 1). During that marvelous tour of the Tatra mountains in Poland, we had time for great fun and deep reflections (Fig. 2–4). I am especially grateful to him for his visit in 2016 to see our new location of the inpatient department (Fig. 5) and to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Palliative Care Department (Fig. 6 and 7). And Robert as a teacher (Fig. 8). For me, especially since 1993, when I participated in the International School for Cancer Care in Oxford (Fig. 9). And during a course in Wisła, Poland in 2008 (Fig. 10).

Zbigniew Żylicz, MD, PhD, Nijmegen, The Netherlands
Małgorzata Krajnik, MD, PhD, Bydgoszcz, Poland



Figure 5. A visit to the new location of the hospital department in Bydgoszcz, 2016. On the foreground: prof. David Currow, Anna Adamczyk and behind Robert Twycross



Figure 8. Robert Twycross as a teacher



Figure 6. The 20th anniversary of the Palliative Care Department, Bydgoszcz 2016, In the front row: Robert Twycross, Małgorzata Krajnik, Piotr Sobański, Zbigniew Żylicz



Figure 9. International School for Cancer Care in Oxford, 1991



Figure 7. The 20th anniversary of the Palliative Care Department, Bydgoszcz 2016. From the right: Wojciech Leppert, Robert Twycross, David Currow. 9th from the right Małgorzata Krajnik and other attendees



Figure 10. Conference in Wisła, Poland, 2008. From the left: Deridre Twycross, Robert Twycross, Małgorzata Krajnik and Aleksandra Kotlińska-Lemieszek

Article information and declaration

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that no conflict of interest.

Funding

None.