

# Using Poetry to Describe the Essence of Person Centred Care Engagement in Palliative Care

Authors: Erna Haraldsdottir<sup>1</sup>, Irene Barclay<sup>2</sup>  
& Hazel Sayers<sup>2</sup> - St Columba's Hospice and  
Queen Margaret University<sup>1</sup> St Columba's Hospice<sup>2</sup>

## Background

- The expressive and creative nature of poetry allows for emotional engagement with issues that might be otherwise hard to articulate.
- A small fund from 'Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief' for an 'Absent Friend Activity' allowed a hospice to run a poetry workshop for staff exploring the essence of engaging with dying patients in a person centred way.

## Aim

To provide a forum for staff whereby using the medium of art allowed for expressing, in a different way, person centred care engagement in the palliative care context.

## Method

A poet facilitated a 2 hour workshop for staff in a hospice which included sharing of stories of person centred engagement with patients. Objects were used to reflect the essence of the engagement in each story and poetry written that further reflected the essence of the engagement.

## Results

Seven poems were written all describing the uniqueness of person centred engagement. Each poem reflects the nature of the engagement and highlights the essence of the relationship in a symbolised way.



## Poems

.....  
Not the urgent starting whistle,  
Nor the plodding tortoise,  
You are a juggling ball  
as it lands  
in the hand.  
.....

Between mammoth machinery  
And flippant remark,  
You are a  
tailor's tape  
that knows my fit.  
.....

Between angular iron,  
And a tiny toy,  
You are satisfying seafood,  
well protected  
and carefully prepared.  
.....

No ivory tower arrogance,  
Or shrugging carelessness of youth,  
You are a weaver  
who works with all the threads  
of my life.  
.....

Neither glib status seeker  
Nor my next best friend forever,  
You see me as  
more than  
the photos in this frame.  
.....

Between the dictate of the dice,  
And the wind chime's soothing gloss,  
You are a stratified stone  
revealing the layer  
that suits the moment best.  
.....

Not a tangle of rope,  
Or a rudderless boat,  
You are starlight –  
a lighthouse,  
my torch at the journey's end.  
.....



## Evaluation

It was evident, as in the quotes below, that use of symbols and creative expression enabled staff to engage with their own personal thoughts and feelings and the nature of the relationship they build with patients. This may have very therapeutic and healing values for staff.

*"I really enjoyed this workshop. I enjoyed the reading of the poetry [we wrote] and seeing how personal thoughts can be put down in a poem to build up a picture and a story reflecting my own thoughts. Very therapeutic."*

*"Insightful, thought-provoking and empowering. Encouraged empathy and understanding."*

*"A safe place to explore thoughts and ideas with colleagues around our relationship with 'absent friends'."*

*"I have much enjoyed the poetry workshop today. It has been thought-provoking and moving – unpicking what it means to be a hospice nurse. I very much feel that a creative outlet for professionals – whether that be art or poetry and so on is beneficial."*



Queen Margaret University  
EDINBURGH