
FROM THE EDITOR

An existentialist in Quebec

Well dear readers, it is that time of year again when I report on the existential lessons I have learned attending the annual International Psycho-oncology Society (IPOS) World Congress. This year's lessons, like many in existential philosophy, were difficult ones for me to integrate personally. But do not despair. The meeting was indeed full of hope, meaning, and science, as advertised. The 12th World Congress of Psycho-oncology was held this year in beautiful and historic Quebec City, May 25–29, 2010, and attracted over 800 participants from close to 50 countries around the world. By every measure possible, the World Congress of Psycho-oncology in Quebec City was a success, in no small part due to the extraordinary efforts of the Congress Chair Professor Lise Fillion, her colleagues in Quebec and at the University of Laval, Dr. Tom Hack, President of the Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology (CAPO), and the CAPO Board and scientific committee which celebrated their 25th annual scientific meeting conjointly with this IPOS World Congress. The scientific program was true to this year's theme of "Hope, Meaning & Science for Quality of Care in Psycho-oncology and Palliative Care." We were treated to enlightening plenaries by Susan Folkman, Patricia Ganz, Betty Ferrell, Margaret Fitch, Mitch Golant, Darius Razavi, Pierre Gagnon, Harvey Chochinov, and others. The pre-conference Psychosocial Academy Workshops drew hundreds of participants, and the symposia, workshops, and paper sessions and posters examined every facet of this year's existential themes. There were so many wonderful symposia, plenary lectures, and paper sessions that I cannot do justice to the excellence of the research and teaching that took place. Therefore, I invite readers to visit the IPOS web site where many of the power point presentations of the scientific program are available (www.ipos-society.org).

In Quebec City, we held the second meeting of the Federation of National Societies, which included more than 25 national societies that had met criteria for membership in the Federation. The Federation of National Societies represents over 5,000 psycho-

oncology professionals internationally, allowing IPOS to have a significant voice in influencing psychosocial oncology care throughout the world. And clearly, IPOS wants to influence psychosocial oncology care throughout the world through upcoming educational training efforts in collaboration with the World Health Organization, and in our continuing and growing commitment to create an agenda and a movement to recognize psychosocial cancer care as a Human Rights issue. We held the second Presidential Symposium on Psychosocial Cancer Care as a Human Rights Issue this year with the participation of Diederik Lohman of Human Rights Watch.

For me, the IPOS Quebec World Congress was a moment of great personal transition. I have had the honor and privilege to serve as President of IPOS for the past two years, and the experience was enlivening, meaningful, and a constant process of moving forward with projects, plans, and initiatives that had the potential to improve psychosocial cancer care in significant ways. There were very few idle moments, many problems to solve, and many challenges to overcome. There were also exciting possibilities and opportunities that made me feel extraordinarily "present" and engaged in a world I care deeply about. So for me, the transition from President to "Past" President, was an experience of "absence". It was as if Heidegger himself were teaching me a real life lesson about the importance of temporality in existence and "being." "Past" President certainly didn't feel like I was moving forward in time or being. There was no obvious element of "becoming" in my new title (identity?) or sense of future possibilities.

I must also say that the sense of "absence" that I experienced was also in no small part due not only to my sense of what I was losing in this transition of roles, but also to the absence of some of my dearest and closest colleagues, friends, and family at the Quebec meeting. Now, in defense of seeming melodramatic and revealing my histrionic personality traits, I must note that I had a wonderful time at the Quebec meeting and felt closer than ever to many of my friends and colleagues on the IPOS Board and many

of the speakers and congress attendees who are long time friends. Luigi Grassi, Luzia Travado, Lea Baider, Jimmie Holland, David Kissane, Harvey Chochinov, Pierre Gagnon, Andy Roth, Matt Loscalzo, Shannon Poppito, David Wellisch, Elisabeth Andritsch, and so many other colleagues and friends shared powerfully moving workshops and symposia, and were wonderful dinner companions. But, there was this sense of “absence”; a sense of sadness that my wife and son could not join me to mark my last days as President, and enjoy Quebec City with me. A sadness that many of my closest and dearest friends and colleagues from Italy and Spain and the States could not attend and re-create the wonderful times of past meetings in Venice, London, Madrid, and Vienna.

Absence, loss, sadness. I suppose it was appropriate, then, that I gave a plenary lecture on “Measuring Hopelessness in the Terminally Ill.” Fortunately I was not feeling hopeless, but I was feeling sad.

Sadness is a very rich and transformative emotion, I have discovered. This sadness; this “absence” that I was experiencing was teaching me a very important existential lesson. This sadness and absence was telling me what was missing from my life at this time of transition, and what I needed to keep pursuing in my life in order to live my life in the most authentic, transcendent, and existential way. I needed the love and closeness of my family and my dear friends. I needed to keep engaged in the activities that marked my time as President of IPOS (and I will through our continued Human Rights efforts). I needed to be an existentialist in Quebec.

Mark your calendars for the 13th IPOS World Congress of Psycho-oncology to be held in Antalya, Turkey, October 16–20, 2011.

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