

In memory of Professor Eadbhard O'Callaghan MD FRCPI FRCPPsych

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Born in 1957, Eadbhard attended St Michael's College, Dublin and studied medicine at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin. He developed an interest in psychiatry while working in the Drug Advisory and Treatment Centre at a time when it was still based in the old Jervis Street Hospital. He then moved to the St John of God Rotational Training Scheme where very early on in his career his interest in research became apparent. Eadbhard regarded psychiatry as no different than any other branch of medicine and if challenged could easily demonstrate that interventions in psychiatry were no less effective than interventions in many of the classical medical conditions.

On completing his pre-membership training Eadbhard took up a post as Research Fellow in the St John of God Services identifying psychotic disorders, including schizophrenia as his main area of research, collaborating with Prof John Waddington. This was a time of great excitement and optimism in that area of research where the expanding fields of genetics and the new imaging technologies were being applied. On moving to London to work with Professor Robin Murray at the Institute of Psychiatry, he pursued an interest in the epidemiology of schizophrenia, publishing what became a classic paper on the effects of influenza in pregnancy, spawning a series of subsequent studies on this subject throughout the research world.

It was to the great benefit of Irish psychiatry and patients that Eadbhard opted to return to work in Dublin, initially as consultant psychiatrist attached to the Cluain Mhuire Service in Blackrock, prior to his eventual appointment as Professor of Mental Health Research at University College Dublin and Director of the St John of God/UCD Postgraduate Training Programme in Psychiatry. As a trainer he set high standards, encouraging and supporting those interested in psychiatry from the time of their first placement as medical students. He was always available to advise and supervise trainees. These high standards were reflected in an exceptionally high pass rate in the membership examination. Training places on the Postgraduate Training Programme became highly sought after.

Eadbhard had a great dislike of being in the public spotlight and this included public speaking but despite this when presenting his research or when advocating new treatment interventions he was both eloquent and persuasive when his arguments had a sound scientific basis. Attending international conferences with Eadbhard and his team was both exciting and exhausting as team members were despatched to various presentations, all coming together again in the evening time to share new knowledge and explore new ideas and hypotheses. Through these meetings he established collaborative links with other international researchers including Professor Tom McNeil in Sweden; Prof Fuller Torrey in

Virginia, USA; Prof Pat McGorry in Melbourne, Australia, while maintaining an ongoing link with Prof Robin Murray at the Institute of Psychiatry. His research was wide ranging including evaluating side effects of medication, examining brain structure through magnetic resonance imaging and exploring the role of obstetric complications in schizophrenia. His interest in the season of birth phenomenon in schizophrenia led him down the path of epidemiology. A generation of young Irish psychiatrists was inspired by his enthusiasm and his ideas.

Over time his research began to focus more on the quality of services and treatments available to patients in this country wondering why it seemed to take so long for patients with psychotic symptoms to receive treatment and the potential damage accruing in the intervening period. He became an advocate for early intervention, eventually establishing the first Early Intervention Programme for Psychotic Illness (Detect) in South Dublin. Eadbhard saw education as central to this endeavour, including education of the general public, teachers, GPs, psychiatric colleagues and most importantly the patients themselves and their families. All interventions were carefully scientifically tested. He visited Malawi on behalf of the St John of God Order and advised them on setting up a psychiatric service in that country.

As a clinician he was always available to his patients and their families. Brimming with new ideas, constantly on the move, his secretaries and team struggled to keep up with him at times. While very aware of the damage of untreated illness he would become frustrated and angry over any bureaucratic obstacles that prevented easy access to care for patients. Although his ideas were based in science and biological psychiatry he was a closet psychotherapist, aware of the power of interpretation and the doctor/patient relationship. His work was recognised through the many awards and research grants he received both national and international, although he rarely spoke of these achievements.

He maintained a healthy lifestyle and was involved in several sports that included tennis, sailing and cycling. On occasions research meetings took place on his boat on Dublin Bay complete with laptop and press-ganged registrars. In recent years he completed one of his long-standing ambitions and cycled some of the Tour de France sections of the Pyrenees. As a supporter of Liverpool he encouraged all of his sons' interest in soccer and spent much of his spare time at weekends ferrying the boys from one match to another.

His untimely death leaves a huge void in the lives of his patients, colleagues and friends. For his wife Virginia, his sons Caolan, Oisín, Harry and Eadbhard Junior, the loss is incalculable.

C.L.