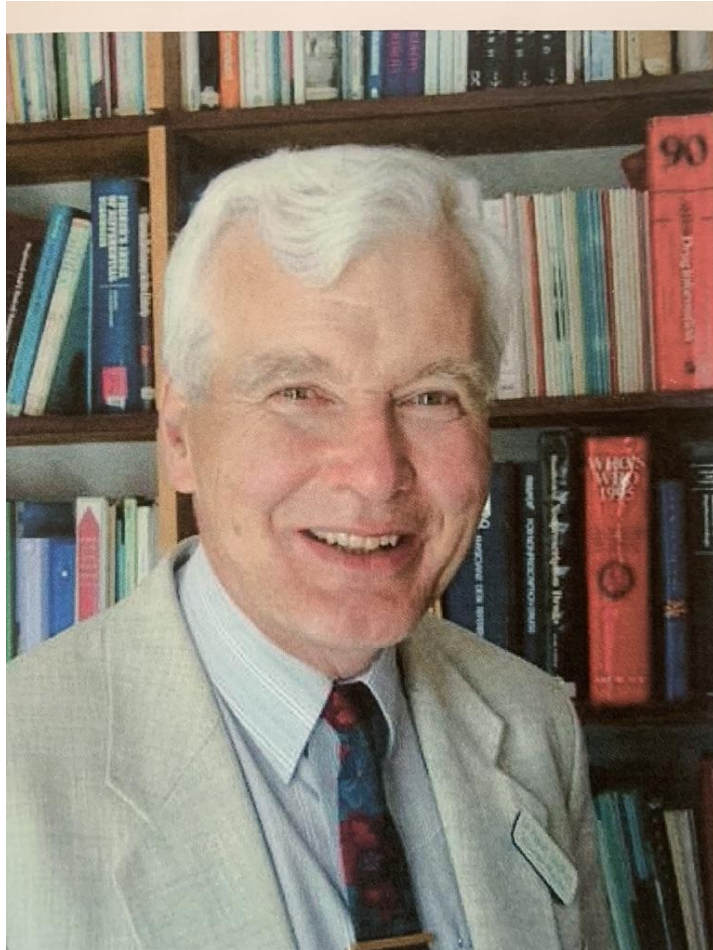


Robert Geoffrey Twycross

1941-2024

(BM BCh St Peter's College 1965)



Clinical Reader in Palliative Medicine and Senior Research Fellow St Peter's

Over 50 years Robert pioneered the establishment of Palliative Care(PC) nationally and globally.

His interest started while a medical student when he heard Dame Cicely Saunders talk about her vision for better care for the dying in 1963 .He subsequently arranged for her to talk to the Oxford clinical students. Dame Cicely founded St.

Christopher's Hospice Sydenham, London in 1967 and 4 years later appointed Robert to be the Research Fellow.

At that time an opioid mixture called the Brompton Cocktail was widely used in the UK. This was a combination of morphine or diamorphine, cocaine, and alcohol or an alternative sedative eg chlorpromazine.

Robert's research for his DM was to disentangle the combination and identify the relevant drug for the treatment of cancer pain.

His conclusion was that oral morphine on its own was an effective analgesic given regularly and that sedation if needed should be prescribed separately.

As a result of this work he was later invited to advise the WHO in their guidelines for cancer pain (1984-6) and the analgesic ladder was created using oral morphine which was theoretically available globally unlike diamorphine which was only available in UK and New Zealand.

In 1976 Sir Michael Sobell House Hospice was opened. Dr. Alastair Laing and supported by George Wiernik radiotherapists at the Churchill hospital, had campaigned for an Oxford hospice. Chris Paine has reminded me that there was a certain amount of opposition from some of the medical staff to having a hospice in Oxford.

Alistair negotiated with The National Society for Cancer Relief (which today is Macmillan Cancer Support). Sir Michael Sobell was then president and agreed the capital for the building, and with the Health Authority taking on the continued funding within the NHS. One of the first, of very few, NHS funded hospices. Alistair remained actively involved with the hospice clinically and later becoming Chair of the Friends. Today there is a Sobell House charity raising several millions/year towards the running of the service.

Robert was appointed to be the first Consultant in April 1976 and was supported by a local GP Dr Donald Richards (father of

Drs. Sir Michael, and Stephen a GP in Henley who was a clinical assistant at Sobell House in 1986). Besides developing a clinical service for the 20 bedded hospice he wrote and lectured widely on palliative care with a clear determination to educate the public and particularly his colleagues that palliative care (PC) and a hospice had a vital role within the NHS, and was an approach that all doctors should incorporate in achieving good clinical care at the end of life.

He established a 5 day course for the medical students incorporating the physical, psychological, social and spiritual aspects of an holistic approach to patient care. He was helped during the '80s by Dr Avril Stedeford (psychiatrist), Julian Britton (surgeon), a local GP Dr Tim Huins, Dr E. David Cook medical ethicist at Green College, nurses, patients and carers.

At this time there was just a 1 hour lecture on PC and possibly a visit to a hospice at most other medical schools.

The notes that he wrote for this course became a standard text "Introduction to Palliative Care" now in its 6th edition.

Global education was also an equal priority and in 1987 Robert was appointed Director of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Palliative Care at Sobell House. He taught in over 40 countries and was particularly instrumental in helping establish services in several countries particularly Argentina, Hungary, India, Poland and Russia.

Robert was a brilliant teacher and mentor who influenced a generation of doctors, nurses, and other social and spiritual health care workers as well as myself. I joined Robert in 1988 and we worked together until his retirement from the NHS.

As a writer and lecturer he was a master at distilling knowledge into a digestible, understandable and memorable format. He made multiple revisions to achieve the high standard for which

he became well known. Review, Review, Review was a mantra he applied to clinical care as well as his writing.

In 1988 Robert established an annual advanced course in Pain and Symptom management which became and continues to be one of the musts for senior PC staff from the UK and abroad.

He recognised the need for a comprehensive guide to the use of appropriate medicines in PC and in 1998 developed the PC Formulary which is now an established text, like BNF, published by Pharmaceutical Press.

Robert identified the need for care of cancer patients with lymphoedema and established research and the first national clinic to help patients. He collaborated with Prof. Terence Ryan and was a founder member of the British Lymphology society.

Robert remained active after retiring from the NHS. He continued actively lecturing around the world and editing his books. He was made an honorary visiting professor in several foreign universities but that recognition was not to be in Oxford!

Robert had always argued against the legalisation of assisted dying and it is no surprise that his last paper explored the challenging issues that a change in the law might bring particularly the potential impact on hospices and PC doctors. He called the article "Assisted Dying: principles, possibilities, and practicalities. An English physician's perspective" He was concerned by the possibility that there could be wider societal harm than benefit from legalising assisted dying.

Robert is survived by Deirdre and their 5 children and 9 grandchildren. He was a committed Christian and a democratic socialist.

He enjoyed following the Oxford United football team, sailing on Farmoor reservoir and bird watching.

He was a founder member of the UK and European Associations of Palliative Care.

His contribution to the establishment of palliative medicine cannot be overstated .

There are obituaries on line in the [Guardian](#) and [BMJ](#).

Michael Minton.

Consultant and clinical director Sobell House 1988-2008.