

Memorial

A memorial for Beatrice Godwin, researcher, social worker and activist with older people

A year has now passed since our colleague Beatrice Godwin died. Beatrice was a committed social work practitioner and a dedicated scholar to the end. Her last article was published in this very journal in the last few days before she died. She was committed to social justice and worked tirelessly to promote the interests and rights of people living with dementia.

Beatrice was a social worker by training and completed an MSc in Social Work Studies at the London School of Economics. After qualifying, she held a number of local authority posts and then became a training officer and a part-time lecturer. Beatrice's professional career culminated in her appointment in the newly created UK National Health Service (NHS) post of assertive in-reach worker, a position she was very proud of. In this post she was involved in a non-medical consultation about the care of people with dementia in residential and nursing homes; and she formed a multi-agency working group with Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health NHS partnership, the local Social Services Department and the local police force in order to develop a Missing Persons' Procedure for people with dementia, which was used throughout the area. Beatrice also trained in Dementia Care Mapping. She went on to train many others in this technique and facilitated numerous training courses on person-centred care in dementia for support workers and nurses in residential and nursing homes in and around Bath and South Gloucestershire.

The NHS post propelled Beatrice into research and she undertook a number of projects, one on the ethics of assistive technology use with people with dementia. Another project involved asking people with moderate to severe dementia about the potential new colour scheme for their specialist dementia residential home. Both projects involved finding imaginative ways to consult with people with communication difficulties. Beatrice disseminated the findings from these projects via journal articles, which I know are being used by a number of academics in their teaching, particularly in the training of student social workers. Her work had an impact in policy and has been cited in a Department of Health report (changing times: improving services for older people 2003-2004).

Beatrice was committed to lifelong learning like no other person I have ever met. She returned to postgraduate study when other people of her age may have been considering a relaxing retirement. I met Beatrice as a fellow postgrad and then went on to supervise her research with Professor Malcolm Johnson. In the time I knew her Beatrice was always warm, encouraging and supportive. She was an active member of our postgraduate community at Bath and was present at every social event and seminar that her health allowed. She was highly regarded by her postgraduate peers, whether young or old, from down the road in Bristol or the other side of the world. Her personable and approachable character undoubtedly helped her in her research, where she was able to capture the lived experiences of people with dementia. These experiences are not just saturated in suffering and sadness but also reflect moments of joy and strength against adversity. How she was able to capture such experiences in her work is evident in the book chapter she wrote entitled "Achieving a good death in dementia".

Beatrice has left the academic community with a number of important articles and reports, which will continue to contribute to the field of dementia studies. Beatrice devoted years to undertaking her doctoral research to improve our understanding of how people with dementia can be better supported. In the weeks before she died Beatrice developed her PhD findings, with the support of Professor Fiona Poland, into an important article published in this journal. "Bedlam and Bliss" highlighted, against common assumptions, that people living with dementia are active and creative in the ways they maintain and enact their sense of self in their everyday lives. Her commitment to research in this field cannot be questioned. Her final wish to donate her brain to medical research, which her family worked hard to arrange, is clear evidence of this!

Beatrice was supported throughout her long illness by her loving husband Michael, and her daughters Ruth and Miriam.

Beatrice's funeral took place one year ago, the ceremony being a reflection of her character and influence on so many people. Indeed, attendance was so high that for many it was standing room only. While the sense of loss was palpable, there was gratitude for having known her. The service included beautiful personal poems and tales of Beatrice's humour and her political activism. At the end we all belted out a joyful rendition of Monty Python's "Always look on the bright side of life". Though there was much sadness, I think Beatrice would have appreciated the many smiles.

Dr Justin Mark Rogers

