

# The palliative care community gathers in IFEMA

Science, conversation and humanism, present in Madrid for the EAPC congress



Association	European Association of Palliative Care (EAPC)
PCO	Interplan
Dates	18th – 20th May 2017
Size	3,000 delegates
IFEMA spaces used	North Convention Centre + hall 10

This is definitively a topic of growing relevance as our society's age and taking care of people in delicate situations is sacred. It is also a very broad medical discipline, in which strict medical science is completed with many human dimensions: nursing and care, psychology, and even a moral dimension. The European Association of Palliative Care has hosted its congress in Madrid, gathering close to 3,000 delegates. We took the opportunity to talk to Julie Ling, the CEO of the European Association of Palliative Care and bring you the highlights of such an important congress.

## Who attends: involving a wide range of professionals and volunteers

This is a multidisciplinary congress which involves, besides physicians, a wide range of health care professionals: nurses, physiologists, psychologists. At this congress, the EAPC also wants to acknowledge the role of non professionals, as many people are involved in Palliative Care as volunteers. So they take the opportunity of the congress to launch the "EAPC Madrid Charter on Volunteering in Hospice and Palliative Care", to acknowledge their work. "Many palliative care organisations couldn't work as well without volunteers: taking patients to the appointments, accompanying them, etc. This is very important, unpaid and unacknowledged work", says Julie.

Another aspect of this diversification of attendees is geographical: palliative care is at different stages of development in different countries, so it is hugely beneficial to people coming from low-income countries to come to the congress to share experiences and the latest advances in that field. "We offer people from low income countries preferential rates, and the International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care has sponsored 20 people to attend", stresses Julie.

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### THE EAPC TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO LAUNCH THE "EAPC MADRID CHARTER ON VOLUNTEERING IN HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE CARE", ACKNOWLEDGING THE WORK OF VOLUNTEERS

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Julie Ling, Executive Director of European Association of Palliative Care

## Challenges, but the congress is doing good

These are challenging times for medical congresses as compliance issues limit pharma companies' involvement and sponsorship. The pharmaceutical industry has also reduced the number of delegates that they invite. Despite this, the EAPC is happy that several large pharmaceutical companies have a stand at the congress. In recent years there has also been an increase in the number of stands from not-for-profit palliative care organisations. Overall the congress aims to slightly increase the attendance of last year's congress which took place in Copenhagen (2,800 attendees).

## A celebration of palliative care

Dry medical speeches? For sure, this is important as "delegates want to get really strong evidence to support learning", and the scientific quality of the event is paramount. But there are also a wide range of talks about the sociological, ethical, psychological, spiritual aspects of palliative care. "We call it holistic care", says Julie. In that respect, the event is also an opportunity to see how different cultures approach palliative care. The topic used to be taboo but our societies are increasingly aware of the importance of talking about end of life, as shown in the recent emergence of "death cafés".

The congress covers a wide range of issues, "including the psychological, social and spiritual aspects of care", says Julie. They will even analyse refugee health and prisoners health for instance. "We are expanding the breadth", says Julie. The majority of people receiving palliative care are cancer patients, but the specialty has grown and now palliative care also provides support to those with non-cancer diagnoses. Palliative care is not just for those with cancer and includes care of older people, children and other specific groups.

## Animating the conversation

Sure, speakers are important, but conversation is key! There are six large sessions with presentations from well-known speakers, but for the most part, the congress consists in many parallel sessions, with over 200 speakers, and 16 “meet the experts” sessions. These are talks with two people having a conversation with small groups, from 5-6 to 100 people, in a very interactive format perfect to cover conversation-intensive topics, like a session on “palliative care and social media”.

To animate the conversation, the event has long coffee (45 minutes) and lunch breaks (1 hour 45 minutes), to give people time to talk and exchange, and to enjoy the posters area with more than 1,000 posters.

And to involve young people to give sessions despite not having huge speaking experience, they offer small sessions like a poster-judging panel. In that respect, the congress encourages young people to come, offering low rates to students. Some are working on European Union funded research projects in palliative care, and this enables some people to come as the funding includes dissemination of findings.



## ...with social media as a great facilitator

For a congress so keen to animate conversation, social media are key. On the first morning, they hold a Twitter workshop so people are active during the congress. Twitter is clearly the tool for live social media comments. “We also have a very good social media lead” as well as using twitter, facebook and linkedin we also have several blogs every week and many more in the lead up to important events such as the congress.

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**THE EVENT IS A GREAT CONVERSATION, INCLUDING MORE THAN 200 SPEAKERS AND 16 "MEET THE EXPERTS" SESSIONS**

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## Technology

Technology is a key element of this congress. “All our congress abstract handling is online, the programme is online, and we generate very little paper”. One exception: “we still use physical posters, which is a conscious decision as we have seen how people used the e-posters”, in a way that does not promote clear reading but rather jump from one screen to the other.

## Spanish presence

The local organizing committee is made up of colleagues from Madrid. The fact that the congress takes place in Madrid sparks much interest. Living locally, this local crowd can register for just one day or come for the whole congress. Many Spanish people have registered, more than 350 one week before the event.

**Spread the word.** The event includes local communication, including a press conference, invitations to several newspapers. “We hope to get press coverage and usually attract local journalists, it is good to get political and press coverage” says Julie. “This gives us the opportunity to start a conversation about death and dying, wishes for end of life, compassionate communities”. These are all really important topics indeed.

## Madrid and Ifema, a winning team

The selection process is very clear. All 58 member associations can apply to host the congress. Amongst selection criteria are flight connections, price range of accommodation, and the capacity and quality of the congress centre. Choosing a city that is attractive makes people more eager to come, even if the purpose is scientific. And Julie Ling is happy: “IFEMA was a really great location, the wifi was reliable, which is very important to our delegates. And all-in-all, the initial feedback is that Madrid was a great location for our congress”.

More than a congress, this is a celebration of a year’s common work on one of the fields of medicine that will be increasingly important. It took place in IFEMA’s convention centre as well as in its hall number 10.

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**SOCIAL MEDIA ARE KEY TO ANIMATE CONVERSATION, SO THE CONGRESS STARTS WITH A TWITTER WORKSHOP**

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