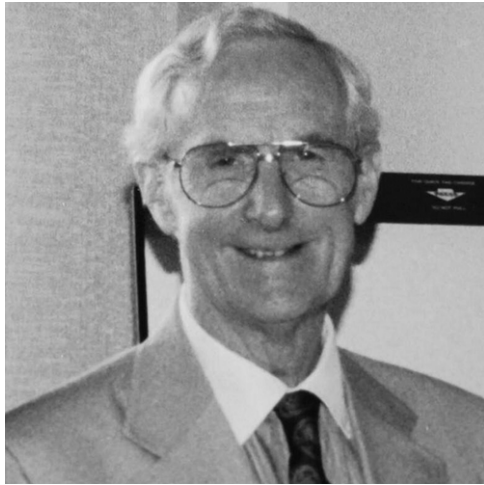


Obituary

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Dr Michael Mulcahy July 16th 1930 – January 1st 2021



Many people connected with Irish psychiatry heard with great sadness of the death of Dr Michael Mulcahy following a short illness on January 1st, 2021. Those who have worked in the discipline of disability and especially those of us who had the opportunity to be his trainees feel a loss tempered by memories of the privilege we had in being guided by him.

Over the past 50 years in Ireland, Dr. Mulcahy continued to shine a light on the unmet needs within disability services. He was instrumental in the development of many of the current health and social care policies for people with learning disability in Ireland.

Dr. Mulcahy was born in Perth, Australia, of Irish parents in 1930. Following the death at 33 years of age of his father, Dr Daniel Mulcahy, the family returned to Ireland. Dr Mulcahy was educated at Our Lady's Bower School in Kiltashee, Kildare, and at Clongowes Wood College, County Kildare. He graduated with honours from University College Dublin in 1953. He then worked as a ship's surgeon with the merchant navy, and with hill tribes in Vietnam followed by a spell in Iraq. He commenced an internship in general medicine in Johns Hopkins University Hospital in Baltimore, USA, in 1956 and began his specialist training in psychiatry in the USA, completing this in St Vincent's Hospital, Dublin, in 1962. He began his career in learning disability psychiatry in the Brothers

of Charity Services, Lota, Cork, in 1962, where he worked for 7 years setting up psychiatry clinics for adults and children. He moved to Stewarts Hospital in 1969, where he remained until his retirement in 1995.

He advocated relentlessly for the development of modern psychiatric services for people with learning disabilities, embracing core values of compassion and respect. People with learning disabilities and their families were always at the centre of his work. From the very beginning of his career as a psychiatrist he inspired and motivated many trainee psychiatrists to pursue a career in learning disability psychiatry. He was a wise and kind mentor to both junior and senior doctors, nurses, and paramedical staff. He always gave freely of his time to listen and motivate people working in this area. Many consultant psychiatrists are happy to say that he was the inspiration for their career choice.

During his time as Chief Executive Officer and Clinical Director in Stewart's Hospital, Dr Mulcahy initiated a programme of deinstitutionalisation. Small modern bungalows were built on the Stewarts campus, and the residents moved from the large hospital-style building in 1982 to community residential services in the following years. He developed a community multi-disciplinary team to deliver a medical and psychiatric service for children and adults within the Stewarts complex and local catchment area. He carried out psychiatric assessments of children and adults with learning disabilities and complex presentations throughout Ireland, North and South throughout his career.

As Lecturer in Psychiatry in Trinity College Dublin Medical School, and Specialty Tutor on the Basic Specialist Training Scheme (BST) and Higher Specialist Training schemes (HST) in psychiatry, he made a major contribution to both teaching, training, and research. He developed the first BST and HST training posts in Learning Disability Psychiatry in Ireland, and he encouraged close collaboration with similar training schemes in Northern Ireland and the UK. He lectured in the nursing schools in Stewarts Hospital and Moore Abbey, Monasterevin, Kildare, for many years.

Dr Mulcahy was a pivotal member of the Learning Disability Faculty of the Irish Division of The Royal College of Psychiatrists. He always advocated for an independent Irish College of Psychiatrists and was delighted with the eventual establishment of the current college over 10 years ago.

He was Special Advisor to the Minister of Health in the Department of Health and Children for many years. One of his most notable achievements was the

development and oversight of the National Disability Database necessary for the planning and development of disability services nationally.

Internationally, he was an active and highly regarded member of the International Association and Scientific Study of Intellectual Disability (IASSID) and was responsible for bringing an IASSID conference to Dublin in 1988 and was elected President of IASSID for a 4-year term in 1992. He had worldwide academic and research contacts in many countries including Japan, Vietnam, and Australia. He frequently organised sabbaticals and clinical placements to Stewarts Hospital by medical specialists, politicians, and health service administrators from all over the world, including Romania, and Vietnam, to mention but a few, in the interest of enhancing services for people with a learning disability.

Following his retirement from Stewarts Hospital in 1995, he continued working as a consultant psychiatrist and was a major contributor to and served on many statutory bodies and voluntary organisations including the Medical Council, the Irish Adoption Board, the Parole Board, Inclusion Ireland, and the National Disability Authority. He was a member of the Mental Health (Criminal Law) Review Board for several years. He rigorously attended conferences and seminars and actively participated in peer review groups to maintain his continuous professional development until the end of his life.

Those of us who knew him as a colleague remember him as a genuine and compassionate person, with a wonderful sense of humour. He had a wide range of interests including a love of international travel, reading, horse racing, politics, and rugby. He continued to travel to Australia regularly until recently despite his advancing years. Despite his gregarious personality he remained a very private person. He was very proud of his family and was a much-loved family man.

It is a rare privilege to have known one person with such intelligence, humour, influence, with a social conscience for the most vulnerable in society, yet so humble and self-effacing. An ordinary, yet very extraordinary man. Irish Psychiatry is indeed honoured to have had Dr Michael Mulcahy as one of its own.

He is survived by his wife of 63 years, Joan, their seven children, his sister Judy, grandchildren and extended family.

His legacy will be the continued development of mental health services for people with learning disability as his input did so much to initiate the move from institutions to community and to facilitate people with learning disability to be supported to be full and valued members of Irish society.

May he Rest in Peace.

Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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