

# Cancer Pain, Suffering, and Spirituality: A Middle Eastern Cancer Consortium Meeting

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In 2006, I was privileged to meet Professor Michael Silbermann and his staff and both attend and speak at a Middle Eastern Cancer Consortium meeting in Istanbul dedicated to solving problems concerned with children with cancer. At that time I wrote a commentary “Middle East Cancer Consortium (MECC): Flying High but Under the Radar.”<sup>1</sup> This past spring, I returned to participate in a 4-day meeting addressing the morbidity often surrounding the mortality of patients, both young and old. The progress in treating patients’ suffering in various countries seems to have made some quantal leaps in this period of time! Places in which earlier it was enough to simply have a narcotic in hand, now, epidural and infusion capabilities were at hand. However, issues surrounding resources, regulations, and societal perception still impede care. Professionals from all over the world discussed pitfalls and their solutions. These discussions centered on taking care of people and families, not just the disease.

The conference, held simultaneously and in the same venue as the 5th Asian Pacific Organization for Cancer Prevention took place during the time of the Good Friday-Easter Sunday and Passover rituals and was in Istanbul, Turkey, a country that is nearly 100% Muslim by religion. I bring this up because of how gracious and hospitable our hosts were and how we as a group of professionals functioned as a team working to solve a problem of caring for upward of 15,000,000 + patients diagnosed with cancer in the world annually. We all had a common “bottom line.” A goal to solve our patient’s morbidities caused by cancer, regardless of who taught us the “golden rule.” If only the politicians could function this well! As I sat in a room with fellow countryman from the United States and listened to and dialoged with people from many countries and many cultural and religious heritages, I was struck by the common goodness and caring that pervaded the meeting.

Einstein, whereas stating he was an agnostic, was spiritual and wrote often about science, religion, and politics. He left Germany because of government policies and would often speak about a world government and ways to eliminate what he called “illiberalism” with regard to thought. Post World War II and the beginning of the atomic era he said: “Responsibility lies with those who make use of these new tools and not with those who contribute to the progress of knowledge: therefore, with the politicians, not the scientists.” He also said, when asked about discovering atoms versus controlling them: “That is simple, my friend: because politics is far more difficult than physics.” Too bad there are similarities in health care.

The MECC stands as proof that we can work together as a global society and that perhaps our civilization that launched man to the moon, sent machines to mars, and could annihilate the earth as we know it, rather put its genius and energy toward tackling great afflictions such as cancer and suffering. MECC you are still flying high and now I ask is it time to be out from under the radar and serve as an example of all things good!

## REFERENCE

1. Kamen B. Middle East Cancer Consortium (MECC) Flying high but under the radar! *J Pediatr Hematol Oncol.* 2007;29:1.