

OBITUARY

Dr Maureen McFarland

MB BCh BAO, DRCOG, MRCGP, MIPM, FFSRH

Born on 2 November 1958, Maureen grew up in a small seaside town on the north coast of Ireland with her two brothers and a sister, children of the Presbyterian minister. In 1976 she left her beloved beach for the city to study medicine at Queen's University Belfast, graduating in 1982 with a commendation in Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

She was going to stay single and be a medical missionary, and during her training she did serve in a mission hospital in Malawi for 6 months and Africa stayed close to her heart; but there were other plans already laid for her life and a certain young orchestral French horn player was delighted when she decided to stay at home and train as a general practitioner (GP).

Maureen was never content with the status quo, was always keen to push the boundaries of clinical practice and was renowned for her multitude of practical skills. Whilst still working part-time in General Practice, Maureen became a Family Planning Doctor, initially working one session each week in Jubilee Maternity Hospital, Belfast. Her many achievements included those detailed below.

In 1993, Maureen was the first doctor trained in Northern Ireland to insert and remove the original contraceptive implant, Norplant[®], and was the initial trainer for implant procedures. Maureen was also one of only two doctors in Northern Ireland to train to insert and remove Gynefix[®] intrauterine devices for her patients.

Maureen set up the first community medically-led menopause clinic and then completed a postgraduate masters award in the Care of the Menopause with Warwick University. In 2007 Maureen became the only Faculty-approved Menopause Trainer in Northern Ireland.

In 2000, she became Deputy Lead of the Family Planning Service, and as her role expanded she took on additional responsibility for service-wide audits and staff mentoring. After gaining membership of the Institute of Psychosexual Medicine, Maureen incorporated psychosexual counselling into her clinic.

Maureen had a secondment to genitourinary medicine, sat on a Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety Chlamydia Advisory



Group and then pioneered chlamydia testing in the clinics managed by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

Maureen was an excellent teacher to anyone, anywhere. She was selected to be a Faculty of Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH) Assessor.

She completed two terms as Faculty Deanery Advisor and until June 2013 she chaired the joint FSRH and Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency SRH Committee.

Maureen loved being able to work collaboratively with Senior Nurse Susan Semple. Together in February 2013, Maureen, Susan and Gerry Duffy were awarded first place in the Northern Ireland Healthcare Awards at a ceremony attended by the Minister of Health and the Chief Executive of the Belfast Trust.

Maureen remained an amazing innovator throughout her distinguished career; however, we will remember her because as a doctor she remained totally focused on her patients.

She was very musical, and marriage to Chris Blake, then principal horn player of the Ulster Orchestra, brought more music into Maureen's life. They had two children, Richard and Joanna, a professional trumpet player and a Cambridge undergraduate, respectively. Maureen nurtured both of them through their ups and downs, struggles and successes, and latterly supported Chris through a transition from working as a professional performing musician to becoming an innovative music teacher working with children with autism.

Maureen was very careful to maintain high standards of ethical practice in all areas of her work, but to talk about Maureen without reference to her faith is impossible. Inside and outside of work you could expect not just a listening ear, but the attention of a person you knew

was really interested in what was going on in your life, be that good or bad.

Maureen and Chris's home was open to all: friends, colleagues, and many waifs and strays. There was always a cup of tea or coffee and a listening ear, laughter or tears.

Maureen's compassion drove a desire for equality and justice. She cared for the marginalised, by volunteering with the night reach ministry from her church, looking after those on the streets at night, to working with Susan, her nurse colleague, in setting up a sexual health clinic for commercial sex workers in Belfast.

Almost 6 years ago Maureen was diagnosed with Stage 4 bowel cancer. She was determined to do her best to be there for her family and work for as long as possible. She had to give up her general practice work a few years ago, but in her eyes that gave her more time for her sexual health work, her psychosexual medicine and her work with commercial sex workers. That work she never gave up, dying while on annual leave on 15 August 2013 aged 54 years. She so appreciated the high standard of care that she received throughout from Dr Richard Wilson and the staff of the Cancer Centre at Belfast City Hospital. Dr Wilson's approach was an important factor in helping Maureen to live life to the full. When treatment options were running out, and still Maureen fought on, they both enjoyed the notion that she was benefitting from 'BTP Therapy': blueberries, turmeric and prayer!

Maureen bore her illness with a graciousness of spirit seen in few people, and when her illness had robbed her of all her physical health she was content and thankful for all she had experienced and the people she loved.

Maureen will be greatly missed by us all, family, friends, colleagues and patients ... until we meet again.

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