

NACTHPC Conference Overview 2017

Helen Murphy:

I arrived at the beautiful Quaker study centre after a long drive through rush hour Birmingham traffic, to a lovely calming atmosphere, a welcome meal and the friendship of the other NACTHPC committee members. After a catch up we started to put together the resources for the following day.

After a good night's sleep and a hearty breakfast, we began to welcome conference delegates, old and new friends and colleagues to the AGM and conference. We began the day in the Cadbury conference room with Jo Dorling welcoming everyone and telling us all about the history of the building and its famous guests, including Ghandi.

I had the task of conducting the AGM and I took the opportunity to appeal for new committee members, as we are again at the point of uncertainty for the future of the association. We thanked Jo Dorling, who was stepping down as editor of The Link, after several years of hard work putting our newsletter together. We also voted 2 new members on to the committee – Theresa Barr (Regional groups lead) and Julie Guest (Treasurer).

Michele Gordon then introduced our first speaker, Brenda Dinsdale. Brenda told us of her background as a counsellor and of her work with a Sudanese women's group. She spoke about resilience and reflective listening in the context of our work as complementary therapists. She shared some techniques with us to build our resilience and her style was interesting, informative and humorous throughout. She left us with many key points to take back into our work and home lives.

After a short break to fuel up and take the opportunity to network we were introduced to mindfulness by Helen Cotter (Spiritual care lead at John Taylor Hospice). Drawing on her background of over 20 years of Buddhist practice she focused on how mindfulness can strengthen and support our resilience. We spent some time in a mindful chair practice and took a tranquil, mindful walk outside in the extensive grounds and around the labyrinth. The whole session was a peaceful and calming experience combined with some practical tips for introducing mindfulness to our patients and their families.

Next followed a tasty lunch with plenty of chat and laughter and then the third session began with an introduction to Jude Meryl, a practising soul midwife. She was able to explain how she, and other soul midwives, support friends and loved ones at the end of their lives, in a variety of settings and environments. In sharing the links between their role and the resilience of patients and carers we were able to see the valuable work the soul midwives do. Jude explained the techniques soul midwives employ, such as the use of essential oils, listening, singing, being observant and the importance of taking the focus away from doing and emphasising being with the dying person. She also talked about the resilience soul midwives must have in the face of death to bounce back and continue their work.

While everyone gained their composure after an emotional hour we were able to sample the essential oils Jude had mentioned and takeaway a soapstone heart as a memento of our experience together.

To finish the day Carole Henderson (founder and managing director of Grief Recovery in the UK) shared some personal experiences of grief, and how this led to her training in the grief recovery method. She went on to teach people to let go of unhelpful messages and unresolved dreams to move on from their grief. With much humour she talked about the unhelpful language that people often use in grief situations and the common myths surrounding grief. Carole gave us many things to think about that might help when we are having those difficult conversations with grieving families.

All our speakers looked at the theme of resilience from different angles but the feedback from delegates told us that each one gave us an informative, enjoyable, sometimes emotional perspective on the subject, leaving us with plenty to take back to our workplaces to share with colleagues and to hopefully enrich our practice.