

Autumn letter 2022

Dear friends of Médecine de la Personne,

Here are some impressions of the meeting of 2022. We were very glad to be able to meet again for the international conference in Holland, after two years of being unable to meet in person because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

The conference took place the 24th to 30th July 2022 in Doorn. The subject was; Solitude and Isolation in Healthcare.

"Het Brandpunt" where we stayed was once owned by a presbyterian missionary Johannes de Heer. He wrote many Christian hymns.

30 people started the days of leisure and for the conference we were happy to be with 39 people in total from Germany, France, Holland, the UK, Switzerland and the Czech Republic.



Rutger Meijer and Netty Brink were our guides during the first few days.

We started the leisure days with a boat trip through the harbours of Rotterdam and enjoyed lunch at "Hotel New York" the former point where emigrants left for the United States of America.



In the afternoon we visited the Biesbosch. This is a swamp area formed after the breakthrough of the Dykes of the river Maas en Waal, named "The Elisabeth Flood". In 1421, it flooded dozens of towns and changed the whole area into a swamp. Many people fled to Dordrecht. This area has remained a swamp until today for recreational and ecological reasons.

The second day we visited the old factories of Schiedam by boat with a guide. In Schiedam gin was made in the 17th century. In the afternoon we went to Dordrecht where we had a guided tour through the old city and the medieval Protestant church.

On Wednesday we went on foot to "Huis Doorn" where the former Kaiser Wilhelm II lived in exile. The estate has remained in the same state as in former days with all the old furniture. After lunch we went on a bus tour in the area passing many old castles.

On Thursday we continued with the scientific part of the conference.

We listened to bible studies from Etienne Robin (F), Dorette & Thomas Zürcher (CH) and Kathy Webb-Peploe (UK).

- * Etienne Robin talked about the Jesus' loneliness. Jesus was helping and healing a lot of people, but He was also lonely, partly because he displeased and offended various people, calling some: "You brood of vipers!"
- * Thomas Zürcher talked about man being alone after the creation of the world by God. God is a God of communication and man should also have another person to communicate with.

* Kathy Webb-Peploe wrote about the negative effect that loneliness has on our patients. What is our practice? How often do we really make contact with the other person deep down inside? The psalmist calls out to God for help. God has been his hope and confidence since his youth. We should remind ourselves and our patients that we need other people in our lives on whom to rely. God is always with us and the Holy Spirit will guide us.

Many of the conferences will be available to read on our web-site.

I have summarised some points from the lectures given by Roland Stettler (CH), Martha Pollard (UK), Jacques Besson (CH), Rachel Melville-Thomas (UK) and Marie-Claude Vincent (F).



- * Loneliness refers to a subjective experience, social isolation is the objective state of being alone.
- * It can certainly be said, that the quality of our social ties is far more important than their quantity.
- * Loneliness it not at all uncommon even among busy doctors.
- * There are multiple short tests witch quantitatively measure individual feelings of loneliness.
- * Loneliness goes well beyond the human need for emotional closeness, for it is also an expression of the human need to be heard and seen, to be cared for, to be able to act freely, to be treated kindly, fairly and respectfully.



- * Loneliness makes you ill, because it causes chronic stress.
- * Mental illness and loneliness often form a vicious circle of mutual reinforcement.
- * Compared to the risk factors of air pollution, lack of exercise, poor nutrition, obesity, smoking and heavy alcohol consumption, the negative effects of loneliness and social isolation on health and life expectancy are greater.
- * In the UK in 2018, the then prime minister Theresa May, even appointed a “minister for loneliness”.
- * People who use social media for more than two hours a day are twice as likely to feel lonely.
- * Trust, which arises from successful interactions between strangers, is an essential pillar of satisfaction, happiness and health of the individual as well as of an economically and socially functioning society.
- * Those who trust others less also feel lonelier!
- * People with dementia often experience, a marginalisation that can only be overcome through compassionate, liberating community responding and action.
- * There is possibly no greater suffering then that of feeling completely excluded from human society.

- * People in extreme isolation, with a true disappearance of the subject from society requires special care when interacting with them; trust, a lot of patience and for the caregiver, the ability to tolerate the total absence of any sign of progress in the relationship.
- * It is often only a long time afterwards that people who have experienced extreme isolation, talk about how important that continuity of care was for them and that they even remembered details about how we paid attention to them which we may have completely forgotten.
- * How many of us dare sometimes to experience silence for a couple of hours?
- * For young people nowadays, the absence of noise and stress creates a sort of panic; they're caught up in an addictive vicious circle of stress.
- * Basically, we are alone! The fact of being in company doesn't always take that away, but it allows us to forget it.
- * Allowing oneself moments of solitude on a regular basis also makes us more free in our relationships, and a way of remaining faithful to ourselves while also being linked to other people by a mutual respect for each person's uniqueness.
- * The acceptance of solitude is a sign of maturity for us and an absolute necessity for anyone who wishes to really know oneself.

We want to thank everybody who participated and everyone who sympathises with Médecine de la Personne. Thanks to you, we were able to have such an inspiring, wonderful and heartwarming week. May you feel nurtured and connected with your loved ones, people and society in general. We hope to see you next year in Germany.

Ingenet Anoff Kwafo and the members of the Equipe.