

Historical Paper

Obituary: Professor Thomas James Fahy, FRCPsych

Brendan D. Kelly

Department of Psychiatry, Trinity College Dublin, Trinity Centre for Health Sciences, Tallaght University Hospital, Tallaght, Dublin 24, Ireland

Abstract

Professor Thomas James Fahy, consultant psychiatrist, who died on 9 January 2023, made substantial contributions to the development of psychiatry, medical teaching, psychiatric research, and post-graduate training in Ireland, England, and the United States. He was a Foundation Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists and Founder Chairman of the Irish Psychiatric Training Committee. He served as Professor of Psychiatry at University College Galway from 1975 to 2001 and also served on the Medical Council and Medical Research Council, among other bodies. Professor Fahy's research interests included depressive symptomatology, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, head injury, suicide, and electroconvulsive therapy. He was a compassionate doctor, an inspiring teacher, a witty speaker, and a superb ambassador for psychiatry in Ireland and beyond.

Keywords: Ireland; medical education; psychiatry; research

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Professor Thomas James Fahy, FRCPsych
(Professor of Psychiatry at University
College Galway from 1975 to 2001).

Professor Thomas James Fahy, consultant psychiatrist, who died on 9 January 2023, age 86, following a long illness, made substantial contributions to the development of psychiatry, medical teaching, psychiatric research, and post-graduate training in Ireland, England, and the United States. He is deeply mourned by his family, patients, colleagues, and the many medical students whom he inspired to follow careers in psychiatry. He is remembered as a compassionate doctor, an inspiring teacher, a witty speaker, and a superb ambassador for psychiatry in Ireland and beyond.

Professor Fahy qualified in medicine at University College Dublin in 1959 and, following training in England, returned as Clinical Director at St Loman's Hospital, Dublin in 1968. He

received his Doctorate in Medicine (MD) in 1969 for work on the phenomenology of depression (Fahy *et al.* 1969). In 1971, he spent a sabbatical year as Assistant Professor and Unit Director at White Plains Hospital, New York, and was offered Associate Professorship with a guaranteed Chair of Psychiatry at Cornell University (Kelly, 2016). Instead, he took up the Chair of Psychiatry at Galway in 1975.

Professor Fahy's research interests included anxiety disorders (O'Rourke *et al.* 1996), post-traumatic stress disorder (Conlon *et al.* 1999), head injury (Fahy *et al.* 1967), and suicide (Fahy *et al.* 2004). In addition, he wrote book chapters (e.g., Fahy, 1991) and letters to editors of journals on a range of topics (e.g., Fahy, 1995), some revealing his trademark wit (Fahy, 1992). Professor Fahy also led the modernisation of clinical services in Galway and, in 1982, co-authored a landmark study on *Electroconvulsive Therapy in the Republic of Ireland* (Latey & Fahy, 1982). A Foundation Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, Professor Fahy was deeply committed to College activities, became Founder Chairman of the Irish Psychiatric Training Committee, and served on the Medical Council and Medical Research Council, among other bodies.

Professor Fahy was especially devoted to developing post-graduate training in psychiatry and, according to colleague and friend Dr Ray O'Toole, 'could claim credit for being the father of Irish psychiatry [. . .] Throughout his professional career he was a role model, encouraging many in their career choice'. Dr O'Toole describes him as 'a fearless leader, compassionate, kind and empathic with the highest ethical standards'.

In September 2001, Professor Fahy retired as Clinical Director of the West Galway Psychiatric Service and from the Chair of Psychiatry in Galway. He was succeeded, in 2005, by Professor Colm McDonald who notes that Professor Fahy 'had an enormous impact on the development of academic and clinical psychiatry in Galway. A highly compassionate clinician, he also possessed an academic

Corresponding author: Professor B. D. Kelly; Email: brendan.kelly@tcd.ie

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intellect of great lucidity and wit. He was an inspirational figure for numerous students and trainees in Galway, where his name and reputation resonated for many years after his retirement’.

Professor Roy McClelland OBE recalls that Professor Fahy was ‘a key figure in Irish psychiatry providing both leadership and a role model as a clinician and an academic. He was a clear thinker, a witty speaker, yet very grounded and with a kind and compassionate nature. His contribution to Irish psychiatry and to mental health in Ireland lives on in the many former students, patients, and colleagues whose lives he touched. I am privileged to be one of them’.

Professor Tom Fahy of King’s College London (an unrelated namesake), recalls being a ‘medical student of Professor Fahy at University College Galway in the 1980s’ and chose ‘to follow a similar career to his as a psychiatrist. This decision was influenced by the interest and excitement that his teaching, charisma and commitment to excellent clinical care generated in this branch of medicine. I am grateful for his inspiration as I’m sure are many of my medical colleagues’.

Professor Fahy deeply appreciated living in the West of Ireland with wife Ann and daughters Kathleen, Bebe, and Alice. Dr O’Toole describes Professor Fahy as ‘a sportsman, injury cutting short a blossoming rugby career, an avid angler who loved fishing on Lough Corrib, a golfer and an excellent horseman. He was larger than life, with a great sense of humour’.

Professor Fahy’s contribution to psychiatry continues to bear fruit with the ongoing development of the discipline in Ireland and, especially, the continued evolution of training structures. Professor Fahy’s personal example inspired many of his students to enter psychiatry, and the care that he provided to his patients and their families are another lasting legacy of an extraordinary career.

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Ethical standard. The author asserts that all procedures contributing to this work comply with the ethical standards of the relevant national and institutional committee on human experimentation and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2008. The author asserts that ethical approval for the publication of this paper was not required by their local ethics committee.

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