

In memory of Dr Jan Kryspin

[The following is based on a tribute prepared by Odoardo di Santo, former MPP (Downsview) and former chair of the WCB]

Dr. Jan Kryspin was a Medical Doctor from the former Czechoslovakia who devoted his life in Canada with missionary fervour to help recognize the psychogenic condition that today is defined as Chronic Pain Syndrome. In the late sixties many immigrant workers who were involved in work-related accidents had their lives destroyed because the “official” medicine had concluded that there was nothing wrong with their back, the problem being only in their head. One physician even claimed Mediterranean people had a congenital weakness of the spine. The dominant opinion of the establishment, both medical and political, dictated the policy of the Workers Compensation Board (then called Workmen’s Compensation Board) and in turn created misery and suffering for the injured workers.

Dr. Kryspin, his wife Dr. Harantz, and a few others found the position of the establishment both scientifically unsound, heartless and brutally unjust to the victims of accidents on the job. Dr. Kryspin was never loved by the establishment, however his persistence eventually prevailed and in the eighties, the Workers Compensation Board finally granted recognition of Chronic Pain Syndrome.

Dr. Kryspin never charged his patients for his outstanding medical reports, nor for the innumerable sessions of Chronic Pain management that he held wherever he could find a place to bring together patients that needed help managing their pain but were too poor to attend the pain management clinics which charged a fee. For that reason, Dr. Kryspin and his wife were among the few poor medical doctors in Canada.

With age, Dr. Kryspin had the passion but not the energy, to the point where when he had a stroke and was advised by his friends and supporters to return to the Czech Republic that was willing to honour him, he insisted that there was too much to do in Toronto, and he refused to leave. He ended up in a retirement home with his wife, penniless and lonely. But if it was frustrating to see Dr. Kryspin and his wife’s decline and their destitution, the events surrounding his last day and his death are most upsetting.

According to two former patients who kept contact with Dr. Kryspin (and provided material and moral support), a car struck Dr. Kryspin and Dr. Harantz who were walking on Winona. When the ladies visited them at St. Joseph's Hospital, they broke down in tears when they saw the couple's state.

On Sunday January 31, 2010, Dr. Kryspin passed away. With no relatives in Canada, and Dr. Harantz incapacitated, the Trustee appointed by the Attorney General had decided to ship Dr. Kryspin’s body to a cemetery with no funeral service at all.

By luck we were contacted and informed of the situation. We made a request to the Attorney General that we wanted to take care of Dr. Kryspin. A viewing was arranged with the religious ceremony held on February 6th.

At least in death he was treated with dignity.