

Mother died after artery cut in 'low-risk' surgery

A WOMAN who had battled cancer died after a procedure to drain fluid from around her lungs punctured her artery, causing her to haemorrhage.

Patricia Johnson, 67, died two days after the 'low-risk' procedure. Ms Johnson had previously been battling inoperable pancreatic cancer, but had responded well to treatment, and an autopsy found she would not have died but for insertion of the chest drain.

Dublin Coroner's Court heard Ms Johnson sustained a cut to her intercostal artery during the insertion of the drain on April 8, 2015. In circumstances described by the coroner as 'extremely rare', Ms Johnson

By Louise Roseingrave

did not show signs of bleeding immediately. She complained of pain and slept in her chair at St Vincent's Private Hospital in Dublin before deteriorating suddenly on April 10.

She had been diagnosed with cancer in September 2014 and had chemotherapy and radiation. She responded well but was admitted to hospital on April 1, 2015 with a fever, and was treated for pneumonia.

Doctors opted to insert a chest drain and the procedure was conducted by a consultant radiologist, Professor Dermot Malone, who inserted a 12cm tube.

An X-ray was conducted, and there were no immediate complications, Prof Malone said.

Ms Johnson's son, Gary, said she complained of 'discomfort' after the drain was inserted.

'She couldn't lie down. One night she slept in the chair because of the discomfort,' he said, adding that his mother expected to go home that week.

Pathologist Dr Tom Crotty found no evidence of pancreatic cancer, or any secondary cancer. He agreed Ms Johnson would not have died but for the insertion of the drain.

Coroner Dr Myra Cullinane returned a verdict of medical misadventure.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

The blazing comet who lit up my life

ISTILL remember the first time I saw him. I was a student and he was a lecturer with the unforgettable name of Liberato Santoro-Brienza. He walked through the door of the theatre, a man of elegance, panache and great taste.

Those were the days when you could smoke indoors, and Liberato puffed on a cigar. Despite being in Dublin for more than 20 years, he was quintessentially Italian. He dressed immaculately, sported a small goatee and had a fiery Mediterranean temperament.

It was not surprising that the topic of his lecture was art and beauty. He used his cigar as a prop, showing how it was an example of perfect proportion. In that moment, we saw the cigar as a work of art – a revelation of the human desire for perfection.

Liberato laughed because, for him, humour was essential to the good life. Nothing could be truly enjoyed in the absence of wit. By laughing, people made themselves beautiful.

Eventually, Liberato and I became friends. I compiled and edited his first book in English. In turn, he gave me a leg-up on the academic ladder.

We were colleagues at University College Dublin for more than a decade. At times, he was like a tempest, but all I saw was someone with a big heart. They say he was a 'character', but that is to diminish his depth of learning, his graciousness and his nobility.

He loved the operas of Puccini and the films of Federico Fellini. He published a book on James Joyce with his friend, the novelist and philosopher Umberto Eco. He believed that a society without serious art and music was doomed to disaster.

We need people like Liberato Santoro-Brienza – people of charm and colour who remind us of our true potential as human beings. He did not so much teach as inspire. He exemplified the virtues of culture, refinement and style.

Without the ability to laugh, to sing, to paint and compose, we are only half alive.

Without beauty, we cannot have consolation this side of the grave. For it is beauty that sanctifies nature and relieves us of our temporal stress.

I recall going to his house for dinner some 20 years ago. We arrived early but we were still eating after midnight. For this was not merely

a feast of fine Italian cuisine, but a feast for all the senses.

Liberato recited poetry, analysed his artworks and deluged us with hysterical anecdotes.

He extolled the value of Italian wine and literature.

And, between courses, he stood and sang from Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*.

It was like attending a dinner party in the 19th century.

Here was a man in love with life, a man whose charisma was infectious. He was a little piece of Renaissance Italy – someone who marvelled at the cultural greatness of his nation and sought to share it widely.

In 2001, he retired from UCD to practise psychoanalysis. He was fascinated by human desire and how it shapes society and its values. Think, for example, how a society that desires God differs from one with only material desires.

Liberato's curiosity was never static. That was why he thrived in his new career, building a successful private practice.

He was magnetic and charismatic, but always sensitive to the doubts and despair of others.

HE had his faults but even those could be forgiven. He could, for example, be very undiplomatic and politically incorrect. But what he said was always couched in gentle humour and, invariably, had the merit of being true.

Last week, my teacher, colleague and dear friend Liberato Santoro-Brienza died unexpectedly. He passed through this world like a blazing comet and one of the lives he set aflame was mine. He taught me the value of courage, the need for laughter and why, without beauty, we are bereft and broken.

He walked into the room, took a pull from his cigar and flashed an impish smile. 'I am going to speak to you about aesthetics and beauty,' he said in his rich Italian accent. He set his matches on the table and began by describing their aesthetic significance.

As he left the room, we looked at each other not quite sure what to say. What was it that we had just experienced? What was it that we had just learned?

We learned that life itself is our greatest teacher.

We learned how to laugh and love the world around us.

That was Liberato's beautiful legacy, and how lucky we are to have it.

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