Obituary: Dr Séamus Mac Suibhne (Sweeney) (1978–2019)

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Abstract

Dr Séamus Mac Suibhne (Sweeney) (1978–2019) was a widely admired psychiatrist, writer and scholar whose contributions ranged from psychiatric care to Greek philosophy, and from medical education to the application of new technologies in educational and clinical settings. Séamus wrote extensively on these and many other themes in the professional and popular literature. In his clinical work, Séamus was a compassionate doctor, effective team-worker and skilled manager. He served as a representative of graduates on the Governing Authority of University College Dublin (2008–2013), secretary (2007–2009) and then president (2009–2014) of the Psychiatry Section of the Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland, associate editor of the *Irish Journal of Medical Science* (2012–2019) and a member of the HSE National Shared Record Project. Séamus continuously wrote essays, book reviews, blogs and short stories, and won the 2010 Molly Keane Writing Prize. Philosophy was, perhaps, his greatest intellectual passion and he spoke and wrote extensively on themes linking philosophy with clinical care, the history of psychiatry and reflective practice in medicine. Séamus wrote and co-wrote on a range of other topics including psychiatric liaison with primary care, ‘vampirism’ as a mental illness, translation and interpretation in psychiatry, synaesthesia, ‘new’ mental illnesses such as solastalgia and hubris syndrome, bibliotherapy, the work of Nicholas Culpeper (a seventeenth-century English physician) and mental illness among psychiatrists. Séamus Mac Suibhne is deeply missed in Irish psychiatry, but his many contributions bear elegant, lasting testament to a dedicated family man, a gifted doctor and an enquiring, often brilliant mind.

Keywords Ireland · Medical education · Philosophy · Psychiatry

Dr Séamus Mac Suibhne (Sweeney) (1978–2019)

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Dr Séamus Mac Suibhne (Sweeney) (1978–2019) was a widely admired psychiatrist, writer and scholar whose contributions ranged from psychiatric care to Greek philosophy, and from medical education to the application of new technologies in educational and clinical settings. Over his career, Séamus wrote extensively on these and many other themes in the professional and popular literature. In his clinical work, Séamus was a compassionate doctor, effective team-worker and skilled manager. A dedicated family man with a profound love of nature, Séamus is deeply missed.

Séamus grew up Dublin and attended Blackrock College where he completed his Leaving Certificate in 1996. He studied medicine at University College Dublin (UCD) where he served as a committee member and auditor of UCD Philosophy Society and on the editorial board of the *University Observer*. In 1998, he was a member of the victorious UCD team on *Challenging Times*, the celebrated television quiz show. In 2001, Séamus won the undergraduate section of the Sheppard Memorial Prize, awarded by the Irish College of General Practitioners. Séamus graduated, MB BCh BAO (honours), in June 2002 and received a Special Award on the Faculty of Medicine's Dean's List and the

UCD President's Award for Excellence in Extra-Curricular Activities.

Séamus worked as an intern in the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, Dublin and St John's Hospital, Limerick. In July 2003, he started his training in psychiatry and held psychiatry registrar posts in Naas, Crumlin, St Patrick's University Hospital and child and adolescent psychiatry in Ballyfermot. In July 2006, Séamus became special lecturer in psychiatry at St Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin. In July 2007, he took up a post as senior (specialist) registrar and lecturer at St Vincent's and UCD. In July 2009, he became senior registrar in Ardee, County Louth.

Over these years, Séamus completed a Certificate in Humanities with the Open University (2003) and a Certificate in Neuropharmacology with the International College of Neuropsychopharmacology (2009). He gained membership of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in 2006 and won the Standish-Barry Prize, awarded for the highest marks obtained by an Irish trainee. In 2009, he completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Medical Education with the University of Dundee and went on to complete a Masters in Medical Education in June 2012. He also earned an MA in the Philosophy and Ethics of Mental Health from the University of Warwick in November 2010.

After completing his training in June 2010, Séamus worked as locum consultant psychiatrist in Cork University Hospital for 3 months and Ardee for 10 months. He took up a permanent post as consultant psychiatrist with the Health Service Executive (HSE) Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary Mental Health Service in July 2011. In this position, Séamus not only led a multi-disciplinary team providing clinical care [1], but also chaired regular inter-departmental meetings in the hospital and took a lead in clinical audit, Schwartz rounds and local implementation of the HSE *National Clinical Programme for the Assessment and Management of Patients Presenting to Emergency Departments Following Self Harm*. Séamus was appointed senior clinical lecturer in psychiatry with the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, based in Kilkenny.

In his academic life, Séamus researched, wrote and co-wrote about medical education [2–6] and had a particular interest in technology as a new and exciting element of both teaching and clinical care [7–9]. Séamus wrote extensively about philosophy [10, 11] and classic texts in the history of psychiatry [12–17], and had a particular interest in psychotherapy. Séamus's other contributions and co-authored papers concerned a dizzying array of topics including psychiatric liaison with primary care [18], 'vampirism' as a mental illness [19], translation and interpretation in psychiatry [20, 21], synaesthesia [22], 'new' mental illnesses such as solastalgia and hubris syndrome [23, 24], various aspects of psychiatric medication [25, 26], bibliotherapy [27] and the work of Nicholas Culpeper, a seventeenth-century English physician, herbalist, botanist and astrologer [28]. Séamus devoted particular

attention to the need for better acknowledgement and management of mental illness among psychiatrists [29].

Séamus loved to read as well as write, and his range of interests was broad. He reviewed books and wrote on diverse themes for publications including the *Guardian* [30, 31], *Times Literary Supplement* [32–36], *Lancet* [37–39], *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* [40], *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine* [41–44] and *Spectator* [45]. He also wrote short stories [46] and won the 2010 Molly Keane Writing Prize.

Séamus served as a member of the Senior Registrar Committee of the Irish Psychiatric Training Committee (2007–2009), a representative of UCD graduates on the UCD Governing Authority (2008–2013), secretary (2007–2009) and then president (2009–2014) of the Section of Psychiatry of the Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland and associate editor of the *Irish Journal of Medical Science* (2012–2019). He was a member of the HSE National Shared Record Project and deeply involved with the Council of Clinical Information Officers as clinical lead for the Bipolar Lighthouse Project, an initiative within the eHealthIreland Ecosystem.

Alongside these myriad commitments, Séamus always prioritised time with his family, made space for his deep appreciation of the natural world, and maintained a keen interest in sport, even contributing to Newstalk's 'Off The Ball' sports programme on occasion. Séamus also blogged extensively, on both established blogs such as *The Dabbler* and blogs he created himself. He posted especially frequently on his personal blog, seamussweeney.net, which took its motto from Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*: 'Poca favilla gran fiamma seconda'—'A great flame follows a little spark'.

With Séamus, there were many sparks, and one great flame. An erudite and humble man, he is deeply missed.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethics approval This is not applicable.

Informed consent This is not applicable.

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