

DAVID TURNER 1949 – 2014

David Turner, my friend and colleague, has died after a long struggle with cancer. David was, without question, one of the most significant figures in UK and European drug policy over the past 50 years. Colleagues, friends and family will miss his easy charm and clear thinking.

Originally from North-West England, David came to the addictions field in London in 1971. He began his career – initially as a volunteer and later employee – in the New Horizon day centre in London where he worked alongside Jon Snow; now anchorman at Channel 4 News. By the mid-1970s David was head of the Standing Conference on Drug Abuse (SCODA), the umbrella organisation for voluntary sector agencies in the drugs field and Secretary to the ACMD. When the ACMD published its game-changing *Treatment and Rehabilitation* report in 1982, David's hand was clearly discernable in most of its recommendations.

During this time, he was a huge influence on the emerging UK drug treatment scene. He was a member of innumerable drug service management committees including: Phoenix House, Suffolk House, Ley Community, Lifeline, Hungerford Project, Community Drug Project, Inward House etc. He created the Scottish branch of SCODA, which would later become the Scottish Drugs Forum. And all his work was characterised by his understanding of individual hurt and his compassion for drug users. It was David who first said, "...a war on drugs must, inevitably become a war on drug users". When the harm-reduction bandwagon began to roll in the early 1980s, it was David who argued that harm reduction meant both preventing the harm drug users might do to themselves and the harm they might do to others. He had the foresight to see that these two objectives might not always be compatible and had the potential to fundamentally change the nature of drug treatment.

And when the UK Government introduced its Community Care legislation and refused to ring-fence local authority funding for drug misuse, it was David who saw that



this would marginalise residential treatment. Much to the Government's acute embarrassment, he campaigned publicly to reverse that decision which undoubtedly cost him his job at SCODA.

David went on to become a huge influence internationally, working with the International Council on Alcohol & Addictions; the World Health Organisation; Centro Italiano di Solidaretà Roma; the European Federation of Therapeutic Communities; the World Federation of Therapeutic Communities (WFTC) and the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs (VNGOC). In his work with these various organisations, David was a powerful compassionate presence, usually working quietly in the background.

Much of his work attracted no byline but David seemed genuinely to have had no interest in such things. I once remarked to him that it was a pity that he hadn't published more. "Oh that's not what I do," he laughed. "I think I'm better occupied trying to make things work." And it was true that this was where he

excelled. Elena Goti, the Argentinian psychiatrist, worked with him on VNGOC told me, "I can summarise his work very simply. He was our brains!" After the WFTC Institute in Genoa in 2010, when it seemed inevitable that the organisation might collapse into recrimination over the issues of harm reduction and religious affiliation, it was David who patiently talked for hours with the main protagonists and produced the masterful WFTC Genoa Declaration.

For all that, I will remember him most as my friend and loyal companion. He was an immensely witty and entertaining companion – he didn't tell jokes but his asides and anecdotes were often hilarious. During one conference, a rather pretentious presenter chose to quote Pink Floyd's *Brick in the Wall*. "We don't need no education", he declaimed drearily and David leaned towards me and whispered, "Oh yes he does. He just used a double-negative!"

He was a kind, compassionate, funny, clever man who saw it as his duty to use his intelligence and insight to support and care for a group of people for whom he genuinely cared. Most of all I will remember a modest man who never boasted of his achievements and never criticised failings in others. When I met with his family at his funeral in Barrow-in-Furness, I was surprised to find that they knew very little about his professional life and his huge significance to the field. "Well, he never talked about it much," one family member told me, "...we just used to say, 'David does something with drugs, but in a good way!'" He would have liked that, I think.

■ **Rowdy Yates** is President of the European Federation of Therapeutic Communities and Senior Research Fellow, Scottish Addiction Studies at the University of Stirling.