

Dr Maud McKee was a GP, psychotherapist, and a pioneer of sexual and reproductive health in Ireland.

Maud McKee was born in Portballintrae, Co. Antrim, the third of four children. She excelled academically and enjoyed music, participating in school plays and debates, and playing hockey, tennis and golf. She graduated in medicine from TCD in 1979. After university she worked at the Altnagelvin Hospital in Derry, then undertook GP training in Newry and earned a diploma in obstetrics and gynaecology (DRCOG, 1982), as well as a certificate in contraception (1983). In 1983 she became a member of the Royal College of General Practitioners, and later a member of the Irish College of General Practitioners.

In 1982, Maud married solicitor and Workers' Party activist Michael White, who would later serve as a Circuit Court judge before being appointed to the High Court in 2011. She and her husband settled in Dublin and Dr McKee became the first full-time physician at the Well Woman Centre (founded 1978), providing family planning information and services to women when contraception was still illegal in Ireland.

In early 1985 she was among the first doctors to work at the new Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU) at the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin, led by Dr Moira Woods. The SATU was initially comprised of a group of twelve female doctors with general practice or family planning backgrounds, who provided an 'on call' service, seeing patients at the Rotunda or, in severe cases, at other hospitals. Patients either self-referred, or were referred by Gardaí, a GP, the Rape Crisis Centre, or other agency. If requested by Gardaí, the SATU would perform forensic examinations and compile reports on assault victims. Dr McKee worked with the underfunded unit on often harrowing cases until the late 1990s, and her testimony and medical opinion was sometimes required in court in cases of rape and sexual assault.

The large number of children referred to the SATU exposed just how widespread the problem of child sexual abuse was in Ireland – and the public health service's inability to address it. Thanks to collective lobbying efforts, in which Dr McKee was involved alongside other doctors, social workers, psychologists and health service workers, in the late 1980s specialist units for children experiencing abuse began opening in hospitals, starting with St Clare's Unit at Temple Street Hospital and St Louise's Unit at Our Lady's Hospital in Crumlin, Dublin, although the sector continued to be seriously under-resourced.

Her experiences at SATU prompted Maud to co-found the CARI (Children at Risk in Ireland) Foundation in 1989, serving on its board until 1996. CARI sought to provide much-needed therapy and counselling to children, families and other groups affected by child sexual abuse. Dr McKee stayed abreast of the latest research and treatments available to survivors (and perpetrators) of abuse. In a 1989 newspaper interview she stated, controversially at the time, her support for psychiatric therapy for offenders, suggesting 'A system such as they have in Holland whereby offenders who refuse to attend therapy are sent to prison is one way of tackling the problem but obviously the back-up services must be there to make it work' (Evening Press, 9 Oct. 1989).

In her work as a GP, Dr McKee received a high number of referrals to help people who had been sexually abused. Finding that the general practice setting did not provide enough time or space to give such patients the support they needed, she decided to study for a Master's degree in psychotherapy at UCD (1990–92), which also allowed her to further develop her knowledge in the area of menopause, researching a thesis titled 'Mythology and the menopause experience'. Maud subsequently worked full-time as a psychotherapist, offering services through two general practices at Stoneybatter and Glasnevin, Dublin, where she

developed a reputation for her work treating women experiencing difficulties in menopause, as well as survivors of sexual abuse. Again, to improve the support she could give to patients in her care, she earned a diploma in psychosexual therapy (Relate, 2001) to better support sex abuse survivors to have normal sex lives, and undertook training in supervision ('relational model') with the Dublin Gestalt Centre in 2007. She was an active member of the Irish Constructivist Psychotherapy Association and the European Association for Psychotherapy, and was a lead organiser of the latter's conference in Ireland in the summer of 2012.

Dr McKee joined the board of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre in June 2002 and served for the next ten years, only leaving because of her final illness. After a long and difficult illness, she died on 26 June 2014 at St James's Hospital.

In posthumous tributes, family, friends and colleagues celebrated her selflessness and empathy, her commitment to improving health services for women and children in Ireland and the lasting legacy of her work, as well as her love of fun and devotion to family.

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