

Biotechnology professor Greg Foley dies after bravely documenting impact of his COVID infection

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Professor Greg Foley died on January 17 in the intensive care unit of Mater Hospital in Dublin, Ireland.

A husband and father of a 14-year-old son, Leo, Greg was just 59 when he passed away shortly after contracting COVID. He held the position of Associate Professor at the School of Biotechnology at Dublin City University (DCU). The *Irish Times* noted, “Until succumbing to Covid he lived a full and varied life. A gifted student, he was a former UCD Newman Scholar and also went to Cornell University in the US on a scholarship. An engineering lecturer at DCU’s school of biochemistry, he was an expert in designing membrane systems and in pedagogical approaches to learning.”

Greg Foley contributed over 40 scientific papers to peer reviewed international journals from 1987 to 2016, with 13 in the top-ranked journal, *Journal of Membrane Science*. He delivered contributions at numerous academic conferences. In 2013, Cambridge University Press published his book, *Membrane Filtration - A Problem solving approach with MATLAB*.

On Greg’s death, his nephew Simon Foley tweeted, “RIP @gregfoley2002, the strongest and sweetest man I have ever known. I learned so much from him. The lasting impact he will leave on those who knew him was immeasurable. 1963-2023”.

Paul Cahill, Head of the School of Biotechnology said in the DCU’s announcement of Greg’s passing, “Greg was an Associate Professor of Bioprocess Engineering in the School of Biotechnology, DCU. He was admitted into hospital with Covid just after the New Year and fought a courageous battle until the end.”

After contracting COVID in late December, Greg tweeted January 11, “Starting an indefinite period of sick leave because Covid has hit me like a ton of bricks... Immediate target to get out of the Mater in one piece.”

Greg had cystic fibrosis and received a double-lung transplant some 20 years ago. In 2011, he received a kidney transplant, but when this organ failed in 2021 he was placed back on dialysis.

Greg’s wife Julie Dowsett told the *Irish Times* that COVID was “the straw that broke the camel’s back... Covid changed everything.” She explained, “For a long time, he never left home. He did lectures from his bed in dialysis. Eventually, we went back into work due to ‘cabin fever’ but it had taken so much out of him.”

On January 12, just days before his death, Greg made the brave decision to chronicle his illness as a vulnerable patient on Twitter as a warning to others, and to oppose those, including in academia, who downplayed the severity of COVID. His Twitter postings over the years of the pandemic included a number opposing anti-vaxxers and others seeking to minimise the danger of COVID infection.

The January 12 series of 10 tweets went viral, viewed over 1.4 million times.

Greg’s tweets began, “Short thread on Covid and respiratory support. There are numerous grifters, and serious academics, out there who seem to think if the fatality stats are not that bad, then Covid is no big deal.”

He added, “So let’s look at one aspect of Covid - the need for respiratory support. Many of the immunosuppressed who catch Covid will need this and there are quite a lot of us and we tend to have multiple

morbidities.”

The tweets included a photo of Greg as he receives oxygen through a nasal canula, as his situation worsened. Another photo showed Greg receiving oxygen via CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure). Under CPAP a patient receives oxygen via the nose and mouth. He wrote, “This can be challenging if you're claustrophobic because the mask is very very tight and the air is forced in under pressure. It really requires you to settle in to it. But not easy.”

His next tweet read, “While on CPAP the bridge of your nose will get very sore and your mouth very dry but what can you do? I do two or three hours at a time. But there are occasions when I just want to rip it off.”

In one of his final tweets, Greg explained the impact of this and offered advice to others who may be undergoing this ordeal.

“Through these treatments you will be turned, washed and injected with drugs and all these minor activities send your o2 Sat's [oxygen saturation] into decline and you can experience real moments of panic. Here you need to communicate with your nurse and make sure he/she moves at a pace that suits.”

Greg’s final two tweets read, “If none of that works, off you go to ICU for intubation where you will be sedated,” and “The grifters like @fatemperor ignore all this. Not an ounce of empathy.”

The tweets elicited a powerful response, with Simon Foley writing, “My wonderful uncle highlighting the importance of taking COVID seriously.”

After Greg’s final tweet, one reply read, “That’s so desperately sad. Thank you for doing this - educating to the end.”

Other responses included:

- “Those last words shall not be written in vain. Rest in Peace.”
- “Rest in Peace, Professor Foley. Those with blood on their hands will face a reckoning some day.”
- “RIP Greg Foley and thank you for using your last time on earth to inform people so directly what it is like to die from COVID-19.”
- “What an insight into Greg's experience and that of others. No-one, least of all supposed experts, should minimise covid. RIP Greg Foley.”
- “His honest and heartbreaking tweet should be broadcasted on all media to show the world the suffering from this horrible #COVID19 virus. My

deepest condolences to his family. RIP Greg Foley”

- “The rich and the politicians get the best of care while we get this.”

Dr. Claire Taylor, a neuroscientist with special interest in Long Covid, responded to Greg’s tweets on January 20, with the message, “I’m so sorry. Rest in peace. We will keep fighting for the medical vulnerable.”

Dr. Taylor is a leading pioneer in the treatment of Long Covid and runs a clinic at Tayside Complete Health in Dundee for patients with Long Covid, and postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS), myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME/CFS) and mast cell activation syndrome (MCAS).

According to Worldometers, Ireland has recorded 8,432 deaths during the pandemic, a substantial number in a country with a population of just over 5 million. Just short of 1.7 million people have been officially infected.

The *Irish Times* reported January 19, “There were 129 deaths of people with Covid in October, 116 in November and 85 in December.

“There were 410 admissions of patients with Covid to intensive care last year; 170 of these patients died and 233 were discharged alive. Some 88 of these patients are listed as being immunodeficient. One patient was in intensive care for 119 days before dying.”

The WSWs sends its condolences to the family of Greg Foley.



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