

Envisioning the Future 2020 & BEYOND

Session Takeaways

G5 Death is Not a Four-Letter Word: Honoring Choice in Grief in Long-term Care Communities

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- Arts-informed inquiry is a holistic form of arts-based research that helps represent and understand a phenomenon and makes findings more accessible to a wider range audience.
- Disenfranchised grief is grief or mourning that is not recognized, accepted, validated or supported.
- Avoiding and hiding resident death is a problem in long-term care homes because it mitigates the staff's own feelings of discomfort without addressing these losses and it projects the staff's fear of death onto residents. It also paternalizes/infantilizes and strips residents of agency and choice.
- Gerotranscendence theory demonstrates opportunities for positive and spiritual construction of aging and heightened concern for others despite natural pain and sadness that occurs in life.
- Art making, journaling and thorough documentation by the researcher during the data collection and analysis process are important in an arts-informed study because this introspective process helps the researcher to reflect on collected data, their role in the study as well as note biases, assumptions and beliefs throughout the entire research process.
- The use of found data poetry can be a useful tool in qualitative research because it can enhance the trustworthiness of a study and can empower marginalized voices in a meaningful way.
- Staff members trying to "protect" older adults and denying them a chance to grieve and residents experiencing internalized ageism as a copy mechanism, causing them to not want to seek information about peers' deaths are examples of how ageism can be found in death care practices. Ageism may also lead to the hidden death care practices in LTC communities that are often based on long-standing policies and myths that avoid dealing with death.
- Key findings of the study discussed revealed that the resident participants did not have a preference about which door they are taken out of after they die, were aware of their own mortality and wanted a choice to say good-bye.
- Honoring rituals such as a vase, candle, conversation/tea circle or quilt may be helpful because they may provide space for meaningful conversations and closure for residents and staff who have strong connections with one another.
- An implication of this study for practice and policies is raising awareness of cultural and contextual death avoidance and underlying death anxiety.