

Improving Communication on Hope in Palliative Care. A Qualitative Study of Palliative Care Professionals' Metaphors of Hope: Grip, Source, Tune, and Vision
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Abstract

Context. Hope is important in palliative care. However, palliative care professionals' perspectives on hope are not well understood. Metaphors of hope are a way of better understanding these perspectives.

Objectives. To describe palliative care professionals' perspectives on hope by examining their hope metaphors they spontaneously used to describe their own hope and their perspectives on the hope of patients and their families.

Methods. Semistructured interviews with palliative care professionals were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using a narrative approach. Results were discussed until the researchers reached consensus and reinforced by other healthcare professionals and by observing several palliative care settings.

Results. The 64 participants (mean age, 48.42 years; standard deviation, 9.27; 72% female) were physicians (41%), nurses (34%), chaplains (20%), or other professionals (5%), working in Canada (19%) or The Netherlands (81%). Participants described the hope of patients, their families, or themselves as a 1) grip, which implied safety; 2) source, which implied strength; 3) tune, which implied harmony; and 4) vision, which implied a positive perspective. Compared with Dutch participants, Canadian participants generally put more emphasis on spirituality and letting go of their own hope as a grip (safety). Compared with other included professionals, physicians used hope as a grip (safety) most often, whereas chaplains used hope as a tune (harmony) most often.

Conclusion. Our findings help to increase the understanding of hope and contribute to improving the communication skills of palliative care

Strengths:

- Diversity of participants' disciplines and work settings
- Use of one interviewer for all interviews
- Investigator triangulation: involvement of several researchers with various professional backgrounds and countries; multiple coders for select transcripts
- Use of field notes by interviewer

Weaknesses:

- Imbalance between Dutch (n=52) and Canadian participants (n=12)
- Imbalanced representation of professional disciplines

Relevance to Palliative Care:

The concept of hope plays an important role for palliative care patients, their families and the health care professionals providing care at end of life. This study contributes to our understanding of the importance of hope from the health care professionals' perspectives, by highlighting four unique hope metaphors. It provides some useful clinical implications of how health care providers could widen their communication repertoire, using these metaphors as a framework, to respond to patients' and family members' unique needs.