

Journal Watch – Grief – September 2017

Article:

The Emotional Labor of Personal Grief in Palliative Care: Balancing Caring and Professional Identities

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Qualitative Health Research, in press.

Article link: DOI: [10.1177/1049732317729139](https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732317729139)

Review:

Strengths:

- Well-designed study using interpretive inquiry (focusing on content and process of conversations)
- Appropriate sample size (n=25) with representation from palliative and other residential settings
- Explicit description of sensitizing concept (emotional labor), which guided broad set of interview questions and data analysis
- Two researchers involved in data analysis with explicit description of analysis process
- Use of participant quotes to support findings

Weaknesses:

- Majority of analysis based on participants working on palliative care units (n=11)
- Did not use codes for participant quotes
- Could have strengthened themes by using patients' verbatim descriptions
- Did not explicitly describe triangulation methods

Relevance to Palliative Care:

Health care professionals working in palliative care experience substantive losses associated with patients' terminal trajectories and eventual deaths. These losses often accumulate over time, with limited opportunities for grief expression. The findings from this study highlight the tension that health care professionals might experience between their personal identity as caregivers and their professional roles. Informal and formal bereavement and grief supports are needed to support staff members who work in this emotionally intense environment.