

Journal Watch – Nutrition & Culture – January 2018

Article:

Feeding: what it means to patients and caregivers and how these views influence Singaporean Chinese caregivers' decisions to continue feeding at the end of life.

Chai HZ, Krishna LK, Wong VH.

Am J Hosp Palliat Care. 2014 Mar;31(2):166-71.

Article link: DOI: [10.1177/1049909113480883](https://doi.org/10.1177/1049909113480883)

Review:

Strengths: Attempts to deconstruct a very complex issue from multiple perspectives through a questionnaire that surveys multiple domains. Considers caregiver wishes separately from patient wishes, giving insight to areas of agreement and discrepancy.

Weaknesses: Questionnaires were answered overwhelmingly in the affirmative, which suggests that the questionnaire may not be as comprehensive as it could be (i.e., the possibility that the questions facilitate confirmation bias by asking only one side of the story). Does not reveal the full questionnaire. Small sample size. Confusing presentation of statistics.

Relevance to Palliative Care: End-of-life discussions can be challenging enough without cultural barriers. This article attempts to analyze and understand a common request at the last moments of a patient's life – artificial hydration & feeding. While this is often considered “futile” and potentially increasing patient suffering, Chinese families are one subset of caregivers that tend to insist on this medical intervention. A survey of the literature suggests that even in Asia, where medical practitioners grow up and train in Chinese culture, the reasons behind this phenomenon are poorly understood. The findings of this article should not be used to stereotype Chinese patients and make assumptions based on their ethnicity; instead, the article should enhance one's cultural competency and awareness of important cultural themes. A better understanding of these concepts may facilitate understanding and reduce frustration/tension in what is already a difficult discussion about end-of-life care goals.