Abstract

Communication is an important component in care for the patients. As human beings, we are all mortal, thus, communication at the end of life is a topic that is significant for all of us. Research on communication with dying patients who suffered from incurable illness is relatively insufficient in China given the fact that palliative care originated in the West. Moreover, previous research focused more on the communication between patients and medical staff who shoulder the majority work for taking care of the patients. There is relatively little research looking into volunteers’ experience in communicating with dying patients.

Communicating with dying patients is the experience that can cause anxiety and stress. As patients with advanced and incurable cancers have exhausted their social contacts due to the prolonged illnesses and people’s general anxiety to communicate with dying people, their shrinking social contacts will result in isolation, which will trigger emotional pain in addition to the physical pain. Volunteers come to assist in caring for them as a form of social support for the dying people, and their communication experience is valuable for any caregivers of dying patients.

The researcher of the study directly engaged with the activities of a group of volunteers in Shenzhen for six months, doing ethnography and semi-structured interviews, so as to understand the practices and meanings of volunteers’ communication with dying patients.

The results showed that three main dimensions emerged, namely, isolation and connection, dependence and autonomy, discontinuity and continuity. Volunteers adopted various communication skills so as to make patients feel that they are still connected to others, enjoy certain degree of autonomy over their body like the healthy people and let them move on in the last phase of their life. They also suggest that there should be more investigations in the end-of-life communication.
Acknowledgements

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Table of Contents

Declaration i
Abstract ii
Acknowledgements iii
Table of Contents iv
List of Appendices vi

Chapter 1 Introduction 1
Chapter 2 Literature Review 4
  Communication in General Health Care Context 4
  Communication in Oncologic Settings 6
    Exchanging information 7
    Making decisions 8
    Managing uncertainty 9
    Response to difficult emotions 10
    Establishing healing relationships 11
  Volunteer in End-of-life Communication and Care 15
    Roles of volunteers in end-of-life care 15
    Perceptions of volunteers in end-of-life care 16
    Volunteer’s experience 17
    Hospice volunteer Program 18
Chapter 3 Conceptual Framework 20
  Definition 21
  The Purpose of the Study 22
  Research Questions 22
Chapter 4 Methodology and Research Method 24
  Methodology 24
    Phenomenology in philosophy 24
    Phenomenological method 27
  Research Method 29
    Research subject 29
    Research ethical concerns 29
  Data Collection 30
    Interview 30
    Interview procedures 32
    Interview questions 33
    Purposive sampling 33
    Sampling strategy 34
    Sampling size 34
    Supplementary data collection 36
  Data Analysis 37
    Steps in phenomenological method 37
    Coding 39
    Reliability 40
    Validity 41
Chapter 5 Results 42
  Open Coding Process 42
    Integration and Emergence of Main Categories 46
      Unsharable pain 48
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Section / Subsection</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Body confinement</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dependence on caregivers</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finding a relief</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empathetic skills</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Autonomous yet connected relationship</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problematic future</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Denial behaviors</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative emotions</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continuity</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>Discussions</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Core Categories</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discontinuity and Continuity</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteers’ End-of-life Care Experience in the Chinese Culture</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limitation and Implication of the Study</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>