8th Public Health Palliative Care International Conference

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bâtir des ponts
building bridges

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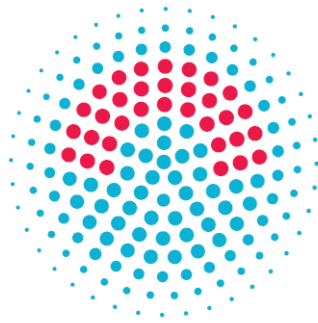
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"*To philosophize means learning to die*"
Developing death literacy in communities of philosophical and palliative care practice

Sandra Radinger, Patrick Schuchter, Stefanie Rieger, Klaus Wegleitner

Conflict of interest disclosure

(x)   We have no, real or perceived, direct or indirect conflicts of interest that relate to this presentation.

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- TYPE OF AFFILIATION:
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"To philosophize means learning to die" Developing death literacy in communities of philosophical and palliative care practice

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The research project

Philosophical practice in palliative care and hospice work.

The role of philosophical reflection in developing a culture of care and knowledge about dying.

(FWF P 35627-G | Dec 2022-2025)

- What does philosophical practice contribute (already actually and potentially) to the development of a hospice care culture in our society?

- What is the significance of philosophical practice for end-of-life care?

What is **philosophical practice** and why research it in the context of **palliative care**?

- A pillar of philosophy. (cf. Gahlings 2023)

- A relatively new, semi-institutionalized offer of dialogic thinking that facilitates the process of philosophizing
(cf. Gahlings 2023; Schuchter et al. 2024)

philosophical practice

- An umbrella term for many different concrete forms of PP.
(cf. Krauß 2022)

consultancy   groups

➔ Seeks to attend to the philosophical problems, experiences, and topics of people in everyday life contexts

Along with wonder and doubt, awareness of ultimate situations like death is the most profound source of philosophy. (cf. Jaspers 1964)

philosophical practice
palliative care

The confrontation with death,

⇒ implies confrontation with existential questions;

⇒ sheds new light on the practice of our life.

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philosophical practice
palliative care

Knowledge

Skills

Experiential Learning

Social Action

Noonan et al. 2016

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developing death literacy

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Study focus: death literacy

How does PP contribute to death literacy and support the development of "caring cultures" in social systems like organisations, networks, communities?

Data generation and set

○ 7 x Philosophical Café à 2h
○ 1-day + 2x 1/2 -day- workshop with PC professionals
○ 3-day-workshop with participants from a caring community

Analysis

○ 3 researchers individually:
  • read protocols side by side with DL literature
  • mark and interpret passages indicative of development of DL
○ compare and discuss insights

Findings 1

Experiences surrounding death and care become visible and conceptualized in relation to …

○ … other everyday life topics
    → "thinkability" of death normalizes

○ … the human condition as such
    → acknowledgement of the individual experience in a greater human context

○ … social conditions that shape the human condition
    → critical dimension of DL and caring communities

Examples 1: Visibility of life topics in relation to death and care

Initial topics, 3 Day Workshop, informal care contexts

- Lack of respect
- Who/What am I?
- Loneliness, inner void, death
- Confidence
- …

Findings 2

**PP grasps process dimensions of DL
(including the notion itself):**

○ Collective conceptualization and verbalization of implicit knowledge as participant think trough a topic/experiences with others
→ learn to harvest knowledge from experience as a collective

○ PP groups as a safe space to experience development of DL and build their bottom-up notion of "caring community"
→ community-building effects

Example 2: Processes dimensions of DL

Collective attempt at a bottom-up definition of their 'caring community', 3-day-workshop, informal care context

Example 3: Topics, critical potential & process

Initial and emergent topics in 3 x ½-day workshops, professional care

Topics sent by team-lead	Topics of participants	Topics of focused collective enquiry
- Help for those who help - Dignity - Moral - Autonomy	- Finding oneself anew - Self care - Freedom in contemporary times - Autonomy vs. heteronomy - Dignity - Finding oneself - Faith in life - Control and acceptance - Equity - Authenticity - Emotional ups and downs - Hope and honesty	➡ What is 'the Self'? ➡ What is 'clarity'?

Conclusions and outlook

○ Complementary relationships of PP and PC

○ PP makes visible the empirically less "measurable" dimensions of DL:

- Deeper understanding of what it means to live in the face of death
- Capacities of engaging and initiating collective processes of learning

○ Significance of experiential learning for DL development + collective experiential learning for social action

Strengthen critical and democratic agency of caring communities

Intensify relationships amongst palliative care and other care sectors (Care Literacy)

philosophical practice

developing
death literacy

palliative care

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