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Palliative care without borders – a shared vision for a better, safer and more compassionate end of life

Jamie Woodworth¹, Christel Wihlborg¹, Jimmie Kristensson¹, Birgit Rasmussen¹, Carl Johan Fürst¹

¹ Palliativt Utveckningscentrum

Introduction: Modern modes of death, dying and grief are often described as “lonely” or “invisible”. Compassionate Communities is a movement which seeks to build pro-social norms and networks in societies in order to alleviate the alienation which often follows grief and serious illness. “The Österlen Project” is a model compassionate community project based in Simrishamn, Sweden.

Aim: To build knowledge and awareness of death, dying and grief in the local community and among health care institutions; to increase the collaboration among institutions and society to strengthen informal networks and community capacity for care.

Methods: The project uses several strategies to engage the community on both a grassroots and institutional level, e.g. “death cafés” and “community round tables” where citizens can come to discuss their individual needs and how to co-create a supportive society around grieving or seriously ill individuals. Data has been gathered through participatory action research and ethnographic field notes. Throughout the research process we have strategically linked organisational stakeholders in such issues as serious illness, death, dying, and grief through event collaboration and policy introduction.

Results: During 2019, the team of stakeholders has engaged in co-organizing five larger events related to building death literacy drawing over 230 people into participation. Articles have been published relating to the project within two different local newspapers. In 2020, the team will work with the municipality towards establishing Simrishamn as a “compassionate community”.

Conclusion: Qualitative data has shown a positive public response to discussion of death, dying and grief; as well as the concept of “compassionate communities. Our primary results indicate that the concept of “compassionate communities” can translate to the Nordic society.

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