

Teaching and Learning about Palliative Care in Singapore: The Influence of Culture in Shaping End of Life Care Experiences

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Background: Palliative care is an emerging specialist area of nursing in Asia. In Singapore very few nurses prior to and after registration have any clinical experience of working in palliative care settings and there is a paucity of research data. There is a need to develop a better understanding of the principles and practice of palliative care in a culture which stigmatizes death and dying.

Aim: This study explored student perceptions of palliative care after undertaking a short preparatory module and undertaking a 2 week clinical placement in Singapore.

Design: A qualitative design using semi-structured face-to-face interviews.

Settings: A Singaporean Polytechnic

Participants: Twenty four students undertaking a full time two year degree programme in nursing practice provided by the University of Manchester in collaboration with Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT).

Methods: Face-to-face individual semi-structured interviews focused on student experiences of palliative care. Interview questions were informed by the teaching and learning assessment document used to achieve practice assessment objectives. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and meaningful terms were coded and categorized into themes.

Findings: The findings highlighted 3 main themes: Apprehension about collusion practices, lack of self-confidence about palliative care knowledge and anxiety about communication skills.

Conclusion and implications: The findings revealed the role that local culture plays in shaping individual and institutional attitudes and practices toward death and dying. Moreover, there are implications for the management of clinical practice for students beyond Singapore in terms of the provision of appropriate clinical support to supplement standard preparation currently provided for palliative care modules.

Key Words: Teaching Learning, Palliative care, Culture