

Dying: The Beginning of the End

People living with Serious Mental Illness

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Aims and hypothesis:

Create concise tutorials for all Mental Health staff to increase awareness about dying and death for people with serious mental illness across settings.

Background:

Almost 1,000,000,000 people globally live with a mental health disorder yet it's a neglected area in public health.

Adults living with serious mental illness have a higher:

- risk of physical health issues
- mortality rate than the general population
- risk of dying earlier than the general population by 10 – 30 years

Methods:

Nine Mental Health staff from Rotherham Doncaster & South Humber NHS Trust were interviewed about their understanding and experiences of Palliative Care.

After discussion about the concept and trial of the concise Palliative Care tutorial, feedback on its potential benefit was gathered.

Results:

Responses to questions about participants' understanding of Palliative Care showed uncertainty and inaccuracy attributable to their limited experiences.

While insufficient knowledge and awareness of Palliative Care within Mental Health has been demonstrated by previous research there appears to be little progress in addressing the issue.

Key themes from participants:

- Palliative Care can be a highly emotive and sensitive.
- The concise tutorial confirmed the need for enhanced awareness in Palliative Care.
- Mental Health professionals often have trusting enduring relationships with people living with serious mental illness: this can be empowering if combined with generalist knowledge of Palliative Care and signposting to relevant resources.
- Training increased confidence: the SPICT tool (Supportive and Palliative Care Indicators Tool, 2019) was effective for their general understanding and identification of Palliative Care needs and how to address them through partnership.
- Using direct terminology such as “death” and “dying” was important to approach the subject with people.
- The training's concise nature was effective and efficient in a demanding working context.
- Add-on training and consolidation was strongly recommended.

Holding on to Daddy

Manchester, UK, 2018

Benji Reid has long bouts of depression.

After a particularly difficult period he created this image as a 'love note' to his daughter for being there in his time of need.

Both are engaged in acts of escapism: mundanely, through her phone and fantastically, as a 'broken astronaut' floating up into the air.

However he's tethered to her and the simple, comforting fact of her presence keeps him in the real world.

FUTURE CHALLENGES:

While the results are encouraging several questions remain:

- How can concise tutorials be widely delivered to address demand?
- What impact could it have on both Palliative Care and Mental Health services?
- What additional areas of training will be required?

*“I just wanted them to lean in,
when I most needed them to lean in, they stepped back” (John)*

Jerwood et al, 2018