

What is a good death?

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Ethics of life and death

Introduction

- Very little research on what patients consider a good death. It seems to be the province of 'experts'!
- I look first at Hospices, and their view of a good death
- I next look at end of life planning
- I look briefly at the concept of dignity
- Death in the global south is very different
- Finally a look at how socially privileged groups have dominated this field of study.

Hospices

- Are not just places where people go to die
- They support many for months, even years
- They employ specialists
- They provide day services, and respite care
- e.g. Dorothy House costs £19,000,000 a year to run
- Government provides 20% of the costs
- It has only 10 in-patient beds

Is there an ideal death?

- To retain control of what happens
- To be treated as an individual
- To have access to hospice care
- To have control of where you die
- To have control of who shares the end
- To have open discussions about death
- Have the chance to resolve conflicts and reconcile
- A good death is a gift to those left behind.

Is there an ideal death?

- To have care which is compassionate and personalised
- To have access to information
- Access to spiritual and psychological support
- To not have life prolonged pointlessly
- Advanced care planning
- The bereaved are considered
- Free of pain or panic

Is there an ideal death?

- To be mentally aware?
- Death is not sudden or unexpected?
- To feel that life was meaningful
- To be treated with dignity and respect
- Familiar surroundings with family and friends
- To understand what can be expected
- A good death will be different for everyone.

Dignity

- Human dignity could be said to be the unearned worth that all humans share equally
- It could be said to be inherent, not merit based
- It is about how humans ought to be treated
- I think we all recognise the absense of dignity, as in humiliation, embarrassment, rape, slavery, torture, genocide, dehumanisation
- It is an ambiguous concept, because it has too many meanings.

End of life planning

- Helps ensure your wishes are respected and eases burdens on relatives and friends
- AKA 'getting your affairs in order'
- Financial details
- Documents
- Possessions
- Final wishes.

Death elsewhere in the world

- The majority of people dying in the world do not have these choices.
- How death is experienced is determined by socio-political factors culture and personal and family wishes
- Death and dying are social issues and we are trying to solve them medically
- We need to talk about death openly, what we want for ourselves when we die, and also what we want for society.

Epistemic injustice

- Socially privileged groups have an excess of credibility
- They are treated as an authority for other people's experiences
- Members of marginal groups experience a 'credibility deficit'
- This leads to various forms of injustice
- This occurs across other categories – race, disability, age, class, ethnicity etc.
- We have to focus on what is actually going on, rather than on how we think they might be.

Conclusion

- We looked at a 'good death' according to rich countries
- Resources will always be limited
- Good enough dying?
- A change in the concept?
- Lot more consideration is needed.

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