

Coping with the process of dying and mourning

The idea of organizing a special issue focusing on “Finitude, Death and Mourning,” arose from the observation of how little such matters are dealt with in our area. When we sought for texts to substantiate the term of reference for the public call to accomplish this task – which occurred between December 2012 and April 2013 – we found few articles by Brazilians. Those encountered were concentrated in journals in the field of nursing, which was only to be expected since nurses comprise the professional group most committed to action in health care. In our search, we also found an English magazine that I recommend to our readers as it has been in existence since 1996 and specifically addresses the issues analyzed here: *Mortality - Promoting the interdisciplinary study of death and dying* - <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cmrt20>.

We were pleasantly surprised to receive more than 50 originals in response to the public call – of which we selected those featured in this issue – from the most distinct parts of the country, with the notable presence of research groups in the northeastern region. We were also able to count on the participation of Spanish and Latin American authors. We also managed to include the thoughts of various professional groups such as nurses, physicians, public health specialists, psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, nutritionists, social workers and law officials.

One group of articles deals with the care of people who are terminally ill, the work of caregivers, the process of communication on the end of life situation and the effect that this experience has on professionals and family members. It also addresses the absence, superficiality or lack of training of professionals engaged in the various levels of health care and organizational problems of the Unified Health System to deal with end of life situations. The opinion of the different actors involved on these aspects is emphatically expressed.

There is another series of articles dealing with the process of dying and the moment of death, the difficulties that professionals and family members have in these circumstances and the means that society has to handle the mourning phase. In this respect, two texts are of fundamental importance: one that speaks of the meaning and importance of Catholic rites, especially the seventh day mass, and the other that is an ethnographic approach to the rites of dealing with death and the dead in a rural community in Argentina.

As this number was based on a public call for articles, naturally many issues have not been addressed, such as rites of passage or bereavement in other religions or cultures. Another issue we would like to have addressed but was not touched upon is the impact and experience of mourning in the event of accidental and violent deaths.

Why is it important that public health should address this theme? The reason is that it is the most ineluctable reality of human beings. Dying with dignity, assisted properly at all stages of the Unified Health System is therefore as important as receiving the necessary care to preserve health and continue on the ever finite and temporary journey of life. All too often highly specialized and competent professionals fail at the moment of breaking “difficult news” to patients and distance themselves when it is no longer possible to “save them.” Naturally, it is very painful for all humans to witness the imminence of death. However, it is more difficult for the medical rationale – that influences all careers in the life sciences – based on the standpoint that death constitutes the failure of the professionals’ ability to resolve the problem. Questioning this rationale, the articles presented here speak of ethics, communication, the sensitivity of ways of acting of those who are alive and whose professional ethos is to maintain the flame of existence until it is snuffed out: this process and this moment that need to be contemplated, respected and lived out with dignity!

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