

Evidence-Based Nursing

The effect of death education course utilizing constructivist learning theory on first grade undergraduate nursing student attitudes and coping abilities towards death: A mixed study design - Wu et al

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4 **Ines Testoni**
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6 **Category:** Nursing issues
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8 **Study Type:** Mixed method
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11 **Author's declarative title:** Death education: The importance of terror management theory
12 and of the active methods
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16 **Commentary on:** Wu, Q., Zhu, P., Ji, Q., Shi, G., Qian, M., Xu, H., . . . Zhang, Q. (2023).
17 The effect of death education course utilizing constructivist learning theory on first grade
18 undergraduate nursing student attitudes and coping abilities towards death: A mixed
19 study design. *Nurse Education Today*, 126, 105809.
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24 25 26 **Commentary**

27 ***Implications for Practice and Research*** 28

- 29 • Death education courses (DECs) prepare healthcare students to manage
30 future relationships with end-of-life (EOL) patients and their relatives. It would be
31 better for DECs to use active methodologies, e.g. creative arts therapies and
32 constructivist and narrative techniques.
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- 34 • Research should longitudinally monitor students who have completed a
35 DEC to check their levels of willingness to work in palliative care and their levels
36 of work satisfaction versus burnout in both the EOL and other hospital wards
37 after they become healthcare professionals.
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43 ***Context*** 44

45 Many healthcare practitioners suffer from a lack of competence in death and palliative
46 care. This gap in clinical experience and knowledge causes negative effects when
47 they must face dying people, such as anxiety, grief, distress, anguish, feelings of
48 helplessness and frustration. Indeed, fear and acceptance of death can be
49 improved through DECs;¹ however, there is a need to better disseminate DECs
50 and improve the teaching methods used.
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Methods

The DEC chosen for this study of Wu and collaborators² adopted constructivist learning theory. The purpose was to examine, with a mixed-method design, the effects of a DEC using a constructivist approach (Group A) compared with a DEC with face-to-face lectures (Group B) on Chinese students. Data collection included a quantitative part utilising the Death Attitude Profile-Revised, Coping with Death Scale, The Palliative Care Quiz for Nursing and a qualitative part consisting of reflective writing after class task.

Findings

Students who participated in the constructivist DEC achieved significantly greater levels of death acceptance, coping and psycho-spiritual social support abilities than those of the control group. As hypothesised, the constructivist method yielded more promising results.

Commentary

The necessity of training university healthcare profession students to be prepared to deal with death and dying is widely complained. The Lancet Commission has launched a scholarly debate aimed at redefining the value of death to close this gap,³ and DEC's are recognised as an excellent instrument for this aim. However, as demonstrated by terror management theory (TMT), the removal of death is the effect of the instinctive need to deal with the paralysing anguish it causes (mortality salience effect [MSE]).⁴ This means that DEC's should pay great attention to the fact that talking about death MSE is activated. Therefore, it is necessary that DEC's also provide teaching methodologies that deal effectively with MSEs. Some DEC experiences have already demonstrated the effectiveness of using active techniques related to creative arts therapies, which are analogous to the constructivist approach, and presenting TMT- and MSE-related content.⁵

Wu and collaborators² confirmed the effectiveness of the active methods applied to reflection on death and dying because of the potential to construct new meanings. These activities, e.g. roleplay and group discussion, allowed students to actively construct their own meaning and integrate with others by sharing opinions, listening to others' perspectives and interacting with each other. This experience of DEC realised by Wu

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3 and collaborators² implemented collaboration, providing motivation to cope with
4 anguishing issues. The study confirmed the importance of active techniques for DECs;
5 however, it must be underlined that, as demonstrated in other experiences,^{5,6} it would be
6 advisable to include content concerning TMT to make students aware of their
7 unconscious MSEs.
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Competing Interests

No competing interests

For Peer Review

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6 Dear Editor in Chief,
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11 Many thanks for your time and attention. I have revised the article:
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16 1) I have reduced the implications to two, combining the first two.
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18 2) I reviewed the language in the second bullet, deleting the word 'followed'.
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20 3) I removed brackets from around the in-text reference numbers and then used
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22 superscript in word to format the numbers.
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24 4) I reviewed the use of the word 'denouced' in the first sentence of the commentary
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26 section and changed it with "complained".
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36 Ines Testoni
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