

Indigenous Peoples and Access to Culturally Relevant Palliative Care

Holly Prince, MSW, PhD (Candidate)
Project Manager
Centre for Education and Research
on Aging & Health

Objectives

- Recognize Indigenous understandings of palliative and end-of-life care, cultural aspects around death, dying, grief, and loss.
- Describe key considerations and contextual challenges Indigenous peoples face when accessing care outside of their communities.
- Apply the concept of cultural humility in the care of Indigenous patients and families at end of life.

Margaret's Story

*“When we are born
Creator gives us
that first breath ...
and when we die,
he takes it back.”*

Fruch, Monture, Prince & Kelley, 2017



Indigenous Worldviews



Artwork by Kevin Belmore

- The Spirit
- The Circle
- Harmony and balance
- All my relations
- Kindness, caring and respect
- Earth connection
- Path of life continuum
- Language

Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2020

Indigenous Teachings in Preparing for the Journey

“Life is a circle, an ‘earth walk,’ a pathway followed throughout life, striving for completeness and wholeness in growing and developing spiritually... Dying is an important part of completing the circle. It is life’s journey coming to completion and the fulfillment of our purpose. In death, the body dies. The Spirit does not die but goes to the spirit world, to a place of understanding and wisdom, returning to the Creator.”

Kinoshameg, Wikwemikong First Nation, 2017

Benefits to Dying at Home

- Supports in-community provided by family, community members and informal volunteers
- Access to culturally safe and culturally relevant care, including access to traditional language
- Familiarity and comfort of home
- Costs associated with travel would be avoided
- Concept of kinship - community comes together, a naturally emerging process of caring for one another

Indigenous Communities Experiences with Loss and Grief

- Historical loss and trauma – colonization; loss of land, language, and culture; residential schools; and child apprehensions
- Today's reality – many losses within extended families; high death rate; early, unexpected, and traumatic or violent death; and a backlog of unresolved grief

Colonialism and the Ongoing Impact on Indigenous Peoples' Health

“Indigenous peoples hold an enormous amount of traditional and community-based knowledge and expertise in negotiating the personal, familial, and community experiences of caring for community members who are very sick. However, through colonization, health systems have been imposed on Indigenous peoples which typically do not support Indigenous approaches to care.”

Improving End-of-Life Care in First Nations Communities (EOLFN), 2015

Health System Delivery

“... It’s like when you watch baseball and you got three outfielders that watch the ball hit the ground because each one thought the other one was going to catch it. It feels like that and that’s what happens sometimes when it comes to [services in First Nations] especially cost issues around supporting somebody...the challenge of palliative care is that it is often not a lot of time to sort that stuff out.”

Equity-Oriented Approaches to Caring for Indigenous Peoples

- It is imperative to address and challenge these structural systems founded in colonialism and racism
- Indigenous communities need to reclaim revitalize Indigenous knowledges and caregiving networks
- Health care system and provides need to support this process through the lens of trauma informed care, cultural safety and cultural humility

Cultural Humility



“Is a process of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust. It involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another’s experience.”

Artwork by Pierrette McLeod

First Nations Health Authority. (n.d.)

Practicing from a Cultural Humility Lens

- Be responsible for your own learning
- Acknowledge that there is a “difference”
- Recognize the importance of language
- Create space for self-reflection
- Accept that you are not the expert in the relationship
- Don't assume that all Indigenous peoples are the same
- Make the effort to learn about individual's values and beliefs
- Acknowledge, reflect and learn from your mistakes
- Embrace the discomfort

Cultural Safety

“Cultural safety is an outcome, based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the health care system. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe when receiving health care.”

First Nations Health Authority. (n.d.)

Engaging Health Systems to Provide Culturally Safer Care

- How can your organization create a supportive environment for Indigenous peoples clients and families?
- How can your organization support and collaborate with Indigenous service providers/organizations to provide better care?



- What are the policies in your organization for getting consent? Are Indigenous communities represented in the decision-making processes of your organization?
- Are the people that you serve, reflective in your organization's staffing? How many Indigenous staff do you have? Do you have Indigenous Navigators? If not, why?
- Do you know who to access for translation services? Are you requesting translation for the right language/dialect?

Additional Resources

- San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training Program - Provincial Health Services Authority , BC
<http://www.sanyas.ca/>
- First Nations Health Authority, BC
<https://www.fnha.ca/wellness/cultural-humility>
- Cancer Care Ontario - Indigenous Relationship and Cultural Safety Courses
<https://www.cancercareontario.ca/en/resources-first-nations-inuit-metis/first-nations-inuit-metis-courses>



Miigwetch...

Holly Prince

hprince@lakeheadu.ca

(807) 766-7274

