

Public Abstract

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Unfortunately, while hospice is believed to be the highest standard of care for the terminally ill, many patients report that they experience pain. Complex health issues such as pain management have been addressed with teams of professionals with different training backgrounds, called interdisciplinary teams. Beyond communication, teams may use collaboration to seek solutions that would not otherwise emerge through the work of only one perspective. This dissertation explores communication and collaboration of two hospice teams regarding pain management. Doctors, nurses, social workers and chaplains participated in the study through interviews and observation.

The results of the study are the communication and collaboration themes that emerged from analysis of transcripts and observation notes. The health professionals communicated about pain through themes of creative, timely exchange of biological, psychological and social information. They collaborated about pain by using the concept of total (holistic) pain, partnering with patients/families, and using a holistic approach to assessment of physical pain. The team members had a common vision but different perspectives. Implications of the study include a need for leadership and structure to support creative approaches to complex health situations. There was a direct implication of the study that social workers could foster interdisciplinary communication and collaboration on these teams. The study lays groundwork for examining effective pain management.