

Book/media reviews

Death, Dying and Bereavement (2nd edition)

Donna Dickenson, Malcolm Johnson and Jeanne Samson Katz

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The Open University Course 'Death and Dying' (K260), offered as part of their Diploma in Health and Social Care, has been a popular alternative to the English National Board (ENB) palliative care programme for several years. Such popularity is set to continue since recent changes have seen participants being eligible for the ENB 931 (The continuing care of the dying patient and the family) award. This book serves as one of the course readers, however the previous edition by Dickenson and Johnson also found a place in many professional libraries and on individuals' bookshelves. This second edition, which has also been edited by Samson Katz, utilizes around half of the original text, of which a significant portion has been revised and updated. The remainder comprises new material reflecting both the changes in attitudes generally towards death and dying, and also designed to meet the needs of students undertaking the revised curriculum of the K260.

This book will stimulate thinking and challenge the personal views of both academics and those in practice. Although quite an emotionally complex book, the style is very easy to read. The content holds an interesting and sometimes moving mix of poetry, theory and real life personal and professional reflections of the effects of a life threatening illness upon individuals.

The text is divided into four sections: 'Life and Death' explores the historical perspectives of how society has sought to internalize the normality of loss and death. The second section centres on the practical considerations when caring for dying people. The use of communication skills and complementary medicine are discussed in the context of cancer and other illnesses in a variety of care settings and within different cultures. Dilemmas and decisions at the end of life are the

focus of the third section. I found this the most interesting section due to the frank and sometimes moving arguments the writers put forward. In terms of palliative care education, it is almost impossible to complete a course of study without having to consider the implications of issues such as euthanasia, resource allocation, withholding nutrition and the seldom-discussed issue of sexuality in terminal illness. I am confident that this section will therefore become a valuable tool for both those new to the area of palliative and cancer care and those experienced professionals searching for a new angle on several key topics in relation to ethical issues occurring in this speciality. The final section explores bereavement. Again, there is an excellent balance of theoretical content and moving prose. There are many modern issues reflecting the recent changes in our society such as gay bereavement, the loss of a child to a single parent and the grief experienced by those with learning disabilities. Readers should be prepared to shed a few tears when tackling this section.

The editors suggest that this book is directed towards all professionals working in health and social care. This is greatly assisted by the diversity of the contributors, which ensures that the book does not solely assume a nurse based approach. Many of the chapters have useful reference lists to encourage further reading.

Each section of this book leads into the other and responds well to the issues faced by the bereaved in modern society. For those who own the first edition, this second edition is worth considering due to the robust manner in which old work has been revised, and because it covers such a variety of issues. This book is a must for pre-registration students wishing to gain greater understanding of the psychosocial issues faced by those with a terminal illness and their significant others.

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