

DIGNITY AS A KEY CONCEPT IN CARE FOR THE ELDERLY

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We want to present first results of an ongoing qualitative research project, dealing with dignity in the context of care for the elderly. Since dying in dignity is a much stressed notion in the context of palliative care we would like to look behind it and try to conceptualise dignity with regard to organising care. Although very vulnerable the elderly seem to be a neglected group within palliative care. The object of the study is to link together the views of the elderly with theoretical concepts of dignity. It is part of a project funded of the “Deutsche Hospiz Stiftung”.

The study is based on 15 qualitative narrative interviews with elderly persons. The interviews were structured by a predeveloped interview-guide. All interviews were tape recorded, transcribed verbatim and the analysis is mainly guided along grounded theory. The sample is chosen from residents of long term care facilities and users of home care services in Germany. In addition we conducted interviews with experts, mainly health professionals of relevant health care settings.

Results and Conclusion

- Dying with dignity has become an overloaded term in the palliative care context
- Dignity cannot not be seen as inherent in human beings no matter what happens to them but has to be constituted through acting and interaction of people.
- There are many ways of “constructing” dignity in daily health care settings, (examples based on narratives will be presented).

Dignity must be seen as concept on its own and has got great relevance for organisations in the context of care for the elderly as much as in the palliative care context.