End of Life Care Provision
Influences of Broader Discursive Formations

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Background
This study examines the discursive formations impacting on end of life care practice in the hospital setting. Practice is influenced by two major and sometimes conflicting issues.

Firstly, the demands of policy and practice drivers to apply tools (apparatus) across differing care settings make little reference to the broader cultural influences on delivery. Secondly, recent years have seen unprecedented media interest in end of life care, and the emergence of powerful discourses that influence health care professionals delivering care. This work focuses on the tensions, challenges and possibilities that emerge from this intersection.

Aim
To explore the influence and impact of emerging, competing and overlapping discourses on end of life care practice in hospitals.

Methodology
Discourse analysis is a collection of methodological approaches, which attempt to link linguistic, socio-cultural and historical aspects of a field of study. Analysing discourses provides a route to better understanding the challenges and philosophy of care at the end of life.

Methods
Collection and analysis of artefacts from journalistic press and terrestrial television (factual outputs) were undertaken. Narratives from four consultants and six clinical nurse specialists working in palliative care, and a cancer centre were digitally recorded, over a two-week period. Guidance was given regarding the aim of the study and length of narratives varied from ten minutes to two hours.

Media Artefacts

Cash incentive for NHS trusts that meet targets on Liverpool Care Pathway

Hospitals bribed to put patients on pathway to death

As minister claims controversial end-of-life plan is ‘tenable’, shock figures reveal...

60,000 put on death pathway without being told

Dailymail 31/12/12

Dailymail 22/10/12

The Professional Voice
There are lots of conflicting messages coming from the media that are impacting on practice [Clinical Nurse Specialist in Palliative Care]

I once picked up a Daily Telegraph and on one page was the LCP and how it was a tool for killing people off to shorten lives and save money for the NHS. On the very next page was an article about physician-assisted suicide — a contradiction indeed [Consultant in Palliative Medicine]

The spotlight of the media on the LCP [Liverpool Care Pathway] and some of the issues highlighted families are saying “oh yes I have read that in the paper” [Consultant]

People are obviously worried that we’re using the LCP to kill off relatives and things like that [Senior Cancer Nurse]

Findings
The media artefacts and narratives have reaffirmed the metaphorical language utilised when discussing end of life care, and highlighted the impact that the sensationalisation of end of life care has on practice, instilling a moral panic that both disables and fuels the need for change.

Prominent discursive formations include:

• Professional Apparatus
• Technologies of Power
• Technologies of Caring
• Technologies of Representation
• Technologies of Self

The tensions, challenges and possibilities that emerge from this intersection influence practice in terms of how we orchestrate and perceive end of life care, how networks of power infiltrate care delivery and finally how media influences the care we deliver at the end of life.

The Cycle of Moral Panic in End of Life Care
(Adapted from Cohen, 2002)

Societal Beliefs and Demands

Research and response called for driven by societal expectations

Research and response accepted promotes fear and denial of palliative care voice

Institutional control politicians promote fear for political gain

Continual media reports reaching frenzy

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References