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) was 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
Influences of Broader Discursive Formations

Illuminating the Discourses
An analytic framework was adapted from the work of Parker (1992) and utilised to analyse the recorded narratives allowing exploration of the imposition, distribution and operation of power through language and the reinforcement or undermining of institutions through discourse (Foucault, 1972).

The media artefacts were analysed utilising a three-phase approach.

- Phase 1 was an initial detailed descriptive analysis.
- Phase 2 saw the emergence of broad categories allowing for textual analysis and a more detailed analysis included the use of language, tone of the article, visual imagery and its impact, how the news was represented, sources quoted and subjects captured (Van Dijk, 2009).
- Phase 3 in which the news articles were explored in their broader context, the landscape the media exists in, how they are read, who are the drivers, who has a voice or not, and who are worthy of reporting (Van Dijk, 2009).

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 Representation
- Technologies of Self

The tensions, challenges and possibilities that emerge from this intersection influence practice in terms of how we orchestrate and deliver the care we provide at the end of life.

The Cycle of Moral Panic
End of Life Care

(Adapted from Cohen, 2002)

Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology
Folk Devils and Moral Panic
The Archaeology of Knowledge
Discourse Studies a Multi-disciplinary Introduction

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References