

# Social acceptance of death and its implication for end-of-life care

Ruíz-Fernández, M.D.  
Fernández-Medina, I.M.  
Granero-Molina, J.  
Hernández-Padilla, J.M.  
Correa-Casado, M.  
Fernández-Sola, C.

## Abstract

**Aims:** To understand how the social patterns about death influence end-of-life care from the perspective of healthcare professionals. **Design:** A qualitative study according to the theory of Glaser and Strauss. **Methods:** A purposeful sample of 47 participants with different roles (nurses, physicians and clinical psychologists) were involved in four focus groups and 17 interviews in 2017–2019. Responses were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using computer-assisted qualitative data. **Results:** A core category ‘the theory of social patterns about death’ emerged, which is explained by three categories: the culture of concealment and stubbornness towards death, the effort and internal work to make death a part of existence, and the influence of the social patterns of coping with death on end-of life care and healthcare professionals. Our results suggest that social coping with death is affected by a network of concealment and obstinacy towards death. **Conclusion:** Recognizing death as part of life and thinking about death itself are social coping strategies. Although healthcare professionals occupy a privileged place in this process, the culture of concealment of death influences end-of-life care. **Impact:** The social process that leads to the loneliness of the dying in our days has been theorized. However, social acceptance of death also influences healthcare professionals’ attitudes towards death. Thus, healthcare professionals’ own attitudes may affect the end-of-life care given to dying individuals and their families. The social patterns of death may contribute to the healthcare professionals’ negative attitudes towards death. The concept of dignified death has been linked to the notion of humanization of healthcare. Death should be approached from a more naturalistic perspective by healthcare professionals, healthcare and academic institutions.

## Author keywords

attitude to death  
death  
dying  
end-of-life care  
grounded theory  
healthcare professionals  
nursing