Constructing belonging of cancer patients with migrant background
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- cultural competence in end-of-life care

Research Questions:

- How do health professionals experience the influence of migration histories in the palliative care context regarding seriously ill patients with migrant background?
- How is the influence of having a migration history experienced by seriously ill and dying people with migrant background?

Introduction:

- Dying is a cultural and social as well as biological event. Where and how we die is influenced by cultural and social factors (1, 2).
- Low use of specialized palliative care services has been evident in ethnic minority groups across western countries since the 1980s (3). Development of professional cultural competence has been initiated (4, 5).
- Initiatives are few and sporadic in the Danish palliative Care context. A need for research to explore the need is pending (6, 7).

Methods:

- 15 narrative interviews with palliative care professionals
- 8 biographical interviews with two men and six women with diverse (western and non-western) migrant background and cancer experience
- 2 narrative interviews with bereaved relatives with migrant background.
- Content analysis

Theory:

- Cultural competence: cultural sensitivity + interpersonal caring + Cultural knowledge + Ability to assess and apply knowledge reflexively in the care context (8, 9)
- Belonging: Social location, Identification and emotional attachment, Politics of belonging (10)
- Transnational migrants often hold double or multiple belonging via the combination of old and new attachments (11).

Results

- “Generally it is about communication. One becomes acquainted better with Ethnic Danish patients; they tell you stories from work life or family life and you get an impression how the family function and communicate, and of what resources they have in humor and such. You don’t get that with migrant patients” (palliative Doctor B).
- “I am not sure if it is because we do not invite them to talk or if it is actually because it does not take some effort and time to get around things. It is like we don’t talk to them about it ever – but there might be a slight fear of contact, because: ‘what did you escape from? what is behind?’” (palliative Doctor B).

“I feel that they take up too much space compared to the other patients and relatives” (Hospice Nurse B).

“So we also have a kitchen by the guest room so that they can cook there too because it takes up a lot of space if they are cooking Arabic foods and the entire hospice smells like garlic” (Hospital Nurse B).

“The reason (for creating a fast food) is that we began receiving some patients of other ethnic descent and we thought: ‘We have to do something’, because they carry on in a different way than we do with their rituals. We chose initially to focus on Muslims, because there are so many cultures and we most likely thought that this was the largest group and therefore chose [Muslims]” (Hospital Nurse B).

“I really look forward to that seminar because I think there is a lot of risk around that [ethnic minority patients] death – some needs a sheet to cover their head and such and who is that? And things like that – I really don’t know (Home care Nurse).

“I have learned a lot just by asking. ‘What is happening now?’, ‘What are we waiting for now?’ I learned this from the first Afghan Family (Hospital Nurse A).

Conclusion and implications for practice:

- Biographical information is often lost in the care context
- Professionals’ and patients’ different constructions of belonging of the patients result in different constructions of motives and needs in the end-of-life care context.
- Despite awareness of common human implications of illness and reactions to illness PCPs respond to diversity by means of cultural knowledge, thus constructing belonging as a single social location (ethnicity) rather than according to the identification and emotional attachment of the patient.
- Cultural knowledge rather than caring tend to gain primacy in the development of cultural competence. This create a risk of undermining patient centeredness in care for patients with migrant background.
- The patient’s construction of belonging toward end-of-life is essential in realizing the patient’s motives and needs as well as access to informal care resources.

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