Categories: Death education,

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Australia

History of death education

The Australian death awareness movement of the 1970s was inspired by the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. A seminar at Melbourne's St Vincent's Hospital in 1971 saw the start of the Australian movement to foster more open responses to death and grief both in the community and in hospitals.

This 2007 study surveys the developments in the field, looking at Changing ways of death in twentieth century Australia.

Today the PM Glynn Institute at the Australian Catholic University calls for a public conversation about death and dying, while the annualDying to Know Day empowers adults to be self advocates for their own personal death planning.

In modern Australia the professional role of end of llfe consultant has developed, with practitioners typically supplying death education, grief support and counselling. Gentle Death Education and Planning provides training courses for end of life consultants and doulas.

Death cafes such as those in Queensland have become popular, while The Death Literacy Index (DLI) provides a transparent way to measure public palliative care initiatives.

Schools and colleges

In 1991 a study explored new directions in death education for adolescents. Meanwhile a 2009 study looked at death education in schools for older children.This BBC article explains how in 2018 The Australian Medical Association Queensland called for death education to be added to the school curriculum as a standalone subject. The same year, a study investigated sources of children's knowledge about death and dying.

While there is no standardised teaching module, The Australian National University supplies Trauma, loss and grief resources for schools, and Palliative Care Australia offers resources explaining how teachers can support students. The Cancer Council NSW has advice for schools on what to do if a parent, student or sibling dies. Books for educators on the subject include Teaching Death and Dying: Resources for teachers.

Higher education

A number of institutions supply death education and thanatology courses. Flinders University has a Research Centre for Palliative Care, Death and Dying which seeks to advance knowledge in the field. Griffith University offers end of life courses such as Death, Grief and Culture, and Newcastle University runs the module Grave matters: the anthropology of death and dying. The University of Adelaide has aLife, Death and Culture course.

Medical and nursing programmes

In 2009 a study surveyed Australian undergraduate nursing curricula. Results showed that death education had a 'minimal presence' in nursing schools' courses. Since then, there have been moves to address death education in medical and nursing programmes. In many medical degrees, death is introduced in a theoretical way in the first year of study, with lectures on the ethics of body donation, and deaths of hypothetical patients.

A 2014 paper from the University of Notre Dame Australia explored nursing students' experiences of death and dying and the implications for teaching. A study the same year looked at nursing students' attitudes, experiences and education concerning end of life care.

The University of Melbourne outlines what medical schools teach students about death. Its Medical School has a learning option entitledDeath and Dying: Lifting the Lid.

The Flinders Research Centre for Palliative Care, Death and Dying investigates end of life online health education uptake by Australian health professionals while the 2020 Care at end of life: Education and training framework from Clinical Excellence Queensland assists hospitals and health services to develop localised education and training strategies.

Hospices and palliative care

The Australian Government's National Palliative Care Strategy has adopted the World Health Organization's definition of palliative care.

Palliative Care Australia is an umbrella organisation that promotes the availability of high quality palliative care. Caresearch provides an overview of palliative care in the country, and the Centre for Palliative Care delivers education and supplies courses and webinars.

A 2006 study on Adult education and palliative care examined connections between the hospice movement and adult continuing education. Later a 2023 study explored volunteers' lived experience of grief and loss.

Studies

A seminal 1975 study examined death education as a learning experience. Currently a five-year study led by the University of Adelaide begun in 2022 promotes death literacy as part of a broader project to improve access to end of life services for vulnerable communities across South Australia.

Institutions

The Australian Death Studies Society is a membership organisation which promotes the academic study of death, while DeathTech Research is a joint venture between Oxford and Melbourne Universities looking at the intersection of death, technology and society.

The Natural Death Advocacy Network supports holistic approaches to death and dying through research and education. Grief Australiaprovides counselling and training.

The Death Literacy Institute offers training and supports compassionate communities. End of Life Essentials has practical resources for health professionals, and aims to improve the experience of those in hospital. The Australian Medical Association has issued a statementabout its position on end of life planning.

Books

Death and Dying in Australia was the first interdisciplinary scholarly book on death and dying in the country.

The Best Death: How to Die Well is a collection of personal and professional experiences. The Intimacy of Death and Dying is filled with personal stories.

In the End: a practical guide to dying is for families, carers and health professionals and looks at the dying process as a natural part of living.

St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney, provides a list of books for those who are grieving.

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