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Canada

Death education in Canada typically embraces grief and bereavement issues, the role of personal experiences, communication strategies and philosophies of death – including its moral, ethical and spiritual aspects. The social model in particular has become prevalent, with community cohesion providing a touchstone for health professionals and grief counsellors.

History of death education

The American Herman Feifel was a pivotal force in the Canadian death education movement. He was considered the first modern death educator whose pioneering 1959 book The Meaning of Death tackled taboos about the subject. Subsequent scholars have continued to explore themes around death, the dying process, and how individuals and communities are affected.

Professor Allan Kellehear first established a public health approach to end-of-life care in Canada, and in a 2022 study called for the creation of 'compassionate cities'. The concept of the Compassionate Community (CC) in similar vein provides a social model of bereavement care; strengthens local networks; and empowers community members. Compassionate Communities in Canada: it is everyone's responsibility is a paper which presents the history of the public health approach to end-of-life care in Canada.

Schools and colleges

There have been robust moves to incorporate death education into the Canadian school curriculum. Pallium Canada's Compassionate Schools initiative supports the introduction of the subject into school curriculums, policies and approaches. The Compassionate City Charter states that 'Our schools will have annually reviewed policies or guidance documents for dying, death, loss and care.'

Death education for children and young people in public schools is a study focusing on children's understanding of death, their coping abilities and the implementation of death education in public schools.

For older students the King's University College, Western University Center for education and grief and bereavement has provided a Death Education Programme since 1976: over 4,000 students have studied for its Thanatology courses.

Conestoga is a continuing education college also offering Thanatology courses focusing on grief and bereavement issues. Douglas College in British Columbia has a course on how to become an end-of-life doula.

Medical and nursing programmes

The effect of death education and experience on nursing students' attitude towards death observes

that nurses face their own fear of death at the bedsides of dying patients. The study investigates the effect of death education programmes and personal experience.

An Examination of Palliative or End-of-Life Care Education in Introductory Nursing Programs across Canada investigates 35 university nursing schools to assess the end-of-life education provided in national nursing programmes.

An international survey of death education trends in faculties of nursing and medicine identifies and describes the availability of death education in medical environments in Canada and the UK.

Hospices and palliative care
The hospice sphere in Canada has witnessed much activity and progress around developing death education as a staple ingredient of professional palliative and community programmes aiming to transform end-of-life care and practice.

Canadian Virtual Hospice is a national organization which provides personalised information about palliative and end-of-life care, whileHospice Palliative Care Ontario HPCO supplies education for caregivers and healthcare providers on advance care planning, Compassionate Communities and hospice accreditation.

The Palliative Care Quality Standards from Health Quality Ontario are provincial quality care guidelines for adults with a progressive, life-limiting illness.

Some Fundamentals of Palliative Care online modules were developed by the Southwestern Ontario Hospice Palliative Care Education programme in conjunction with St. Joseph's Health Care.

The Ontario Palliative Care Network Toolkit offers best practice tools from around the world to support primary care providers delivering palliative care. The Palliative Care Toolkit for Indigenous Communities includes resources and reference material for First Nations, Métis and Inuit families and communities.

The Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association advocates for quality end-of-life care in the country, while the Contemplative End of Life Care programme supports health care professionals and lay people who want to serve their communities.

Studies
Death education has been the subject of many academic studies in Canada.

Reaching wide and deep: public pedagogy of death and dying in Canada looks at 'public death educators' to understand their messages about death and dying, and observe how they educate the public.

Acknowledging bereavement, strengthening communities: Introducing an online compassionate community initiative for the recognition of pandemic grief describes a Quebec online support community for those who lost a loved one during the pandemic. It looks at the CC model and the influence of Pallium Canada on practice, including a focus on marginalised communities.

Institutions
A number of bodies aim to raise awareness about death and dying, support the creation of

professional standards and contribute to communities coming together.

The Canadian Integrative Network for Death Education and Alternatives (CINDEA) is an organization which respects ancient death traditions that have traction in modern life. The network celebrates the role of nature and the cycles of life and death. Its website provides comprehensive offerings on bereavement, including less well-known resources.

DyingMatters.ca is dedicated to growing knowledge about death and grief literacy – the skills people need to support themselves and others at the end of life.

Books
Books on the topic of death education include Dying and Death in Canada, which explores the role of society and culture.

21 Days to Die: The Canadian Guide to End-Of-Life was written during the pandemic, and discusses how to learn from the process of dying. This Canadian Virtual Hospice page provides a list of books on death and dying including those in French.

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