

Book review

Fading Away: The Experience of Transition in Families with Terminal Illness

Betty Davies, Joanne Chekryn Reimer, Pamela Brown, and Nola Martens
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Reviewed by Ariella Lang

Fading Away: The Experience of Transition in Families with Terminal Illness examines how patients with advanced cancer and members of their family experience the process of "fading away": the transition from living with cancer to experiencing a death from cancer. This book is based on a prospective qualitative study that, unlike most research done in this domain, included the patient and did not rely on a family member's recollection of the palliative-care situation. It is one of the first publications to maintain a family perspective that focuses on the palliative-care experience of the patient, the spouse, and the children as they describe it both individually and as a family.

Using a grounded theory approach, the authors interviewed 71 family members in 23 families with a member who had lived with cancer between a few months and four years prior to the interview. Patients and their family members were interviewed individually and as a unit. Analysis of the data resulted in a theoretic scheme. To scrutinize the rigour of these findings, the conceptualization of this transitional process was tested with five additional families, who reported that the description of the phenomenon of "fading away" made sense to them.

The book has a unique structure. The first chapter is an overview of the construct of "fading away" and its components (i.e., redefining, burdening, struggling with paradox, contending with change, searching for meaning, living day to day, preparing for death). Subsequent chapters describe in greater depth the different perceptions of the patient,

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spouse, and children regarding each component of this transitional process. Although these components do not necessarily fall in any particular sequence, the authors propose that over time they accumulate, overlap, and recur, beginning with the patient's redefinition of self and the family's redefinition of the patient.

The strength of this book lies in its exploration of this experience from the separate perspectives of the patient, spouse, and children as well as the family as a unit. Together, these various perspectives describe what it is like for a family to cope with advanced cancer. The authors suggest that individual variations can be better understood when viewed from the perspective that the family unit is different from, but closely related to, the separate lives of its members. Guidelines for the care of the patient and the family can be found at the end of each chapter. Finally, a section is devoted to the challenges of conducting research in palliative care as well as the specifics of the qualitative study on which the book is based.

This book makes an important contribution to existing knowledge about how patients and families make the transition from living with cancer to experiencing a death from cancer. It is an excellent resource both for its rich descriptions and its care guidelines. It is also invaluable to practitioners who work with patients requiring palliative care and to their families, as well as to the public at large. For educators, particularly in nursing, the book will be an important resource in both undergraduate and graduate curricula. Indeed, it has much to offer to clinicians, educators, and researchers alike in developing their expertise and increasing their understanding of how patients and families experience the transition of "fading away."