

Journal Club

Grand Rounds
Division of Geriatric Medicine
August 15, 2014
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“Don’t Get Weak in Your Compassion” :
Bereaved Next of Kin’s Suggestions for Improving
End-of-Life Care in Veterans Affairs Medical
Centers

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JAGS 62:642-648, 2014

Objective

- To analyze bereaved next of kin's suggestions for improving end-of-life (EOL) care in Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Centers (VAMC's).



Design

- Qualitative



Setting

- Six southeast VAMC's (part of a larger trial: Best Practices for End-of-Life Care for Our Nation's Veterans – BEACON Trial)



Birmingham VA Medical Center

Participants

- Bereaved next of kin (n = 78) of veterans who died between 2005 and 2010.



Eligibility

- 21 or older
- Next of kin (not necessarily a family member)
- Familiar with veteran's EOL care

Methods

- Semistructured interviews
- Seven broad questions with follow-up probes addressed background information about the veteran, events surrounding the veteran's death, perceptions of the veteran's last days, veteran's preferences for care, their feelings about the veteran's care and treatment and the bereavement experience and "Do you have any suggestions for the VA that can make this experience any easier for other families?"

Process

- Abstraction of textual data addressing:
 - Care needs
 - Praise
 - Criticism
 - Recommendations
- All coded as “suggestions.”

Participants

- 78.2% Female
- 62.8% White
- Mean age 63.5
- 39.7% Surviving Spouse
- 29.5% Adult Child
- 30.8% Other



Table 1: Themes & Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
COMPASSIONATE CARE	Emotional effect of compassionate care
	Essential attribute of EOL care staff
	Important part of EOL care
GOOD COMMUNICATION	Need for information
	Need to be heard
	Need for consistency
SUPPORT FOR FAMILY VISITS & PRIVACY	Environment
	Visitation policy
NEED FOR DEATH PREPARATION & POSTDEATH GUIDANCE	Practical assistance
	Information
	Support
SALIENCE OF RELATIONSHIP WITH VA	VA praise
	Negative perceptions persist

Compassionate Care

- Mentioned by 51% of participants.



Good Communication

- Identified as important by 46% of participants.



Need for Information

- Condition
- Prognosis
- Plan of Care



Need to be Heard

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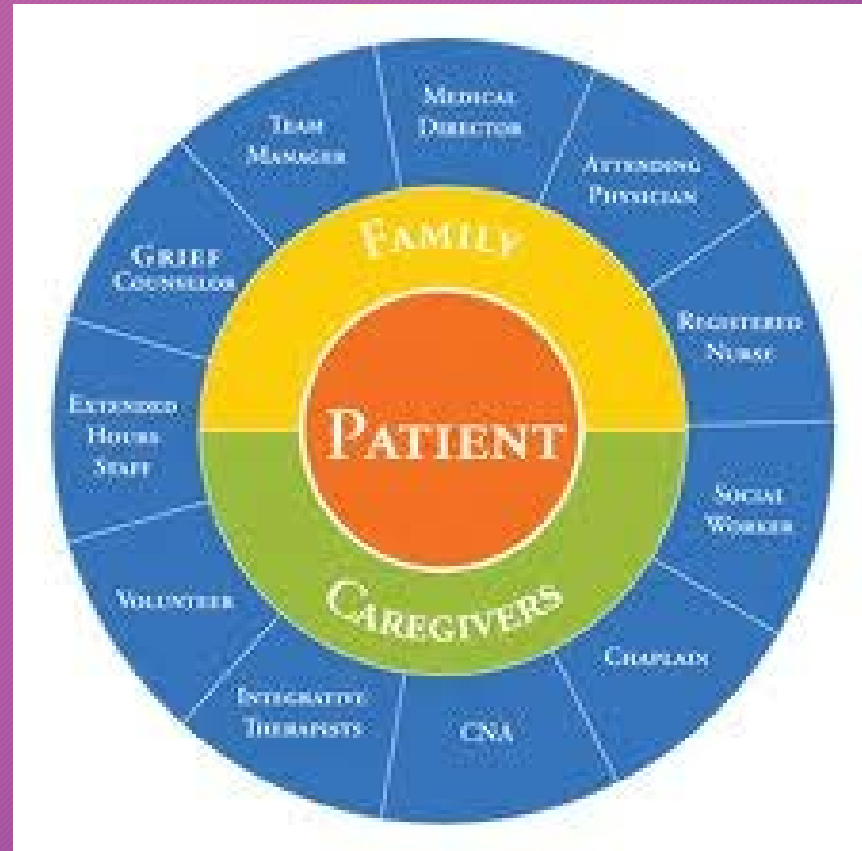
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Sharing the Journey

Need for Consistency

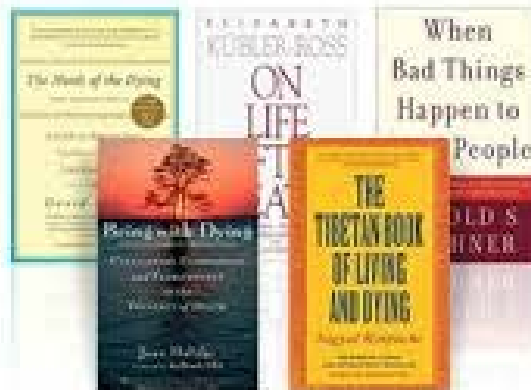


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Need for Death Preparation & Postdeath Guidance

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Salience of Relationship with the VA

- Mentioned by 26% of participants.



PVAMC CLC Honor Guard



Limitations

- Next of kin's perceptions rather than patients'
- Perceptions of care at the VA might not translate to other settings



VA Mandate

- “Veterans’ service to their country and the sacrifices they made to protect freedom demand exemplary service from VA hospital staff.”



