



Center of Palliative Care
Oldenburg

Core Attitude of Professionals in Palliative Care

Simon S^{1,2}, Ramsenthaler C³, Geiss G³

¹ipac – Institute of Palliative Care and ²Center of Palliative Care, Evangelisches Krankenhaus

³Department of Psychology, University of Oldenburg
Oldenburg/Germany



Background

The term 'core attitude' describes the way in which a person is aware of her-/himself and the world around, and in which he/she forms the basis for his/her thoughts and actions (Doerner 2001). Self-awareness of interactions with patients is a core competence of professionals in palliative care.

Aims

The aim of this study was to explore the meaning of 'core attitude' in palliative care professionals.

Sample and Methods

We conducted in-depth and face-to-face interviews with 10 palliative care specialists with different professional background, using a semi-structured interview approach. Interviews were taped, transcribed and analyzed on the basis of content analysis (Mayring 2002) by three researchers.

Table 1 – Interviewed professionals (n=10)

Gender	7 women, 3 men
Age	Ø 47.6 years (range 40-60)
Profession	4 nurses, 3 physicians, 2 psychologists, 1 chaplain
Working experience in palliative care	Ø 9.9 years (range 1,5-20)

Results

Core attitudes in palliative care as described by the interview partners can be related to three areas:

- 1) personal characteristics,
- 2) experience of core attitude,
- 3) competence in care/'skills' (see **Table 2**).

Authenticity is the most important element of personal characteristics, followed by honesty, mindfulness, or openness. Core attitude can be experienced best within the relationship between patient and carer. Finally, sensitive perception is one of the key elements in the competence of care, along with active listening and an appropriate balance between closeness and distance.

We derived a detailed model of the development of the core attitude during life time (see **Figure 1**). While a subconscious form of the core attitude is culturally imprinted in early childhood, it develops in a cyclic process towards a conscious and reflected state. The contact with death and dying represents one of many possible focal points in this process.

Table 2 – Core attitude in palliative care

Personal characteristics	Experience of core attitude	Competence in care/'skills'
authenticity	in relationship	perception
honesty	dialog	active listening
mindfulness	companionship	getting involved
esteem/appreciation	systemic approach	allowing space
openness		letting go
personal presence		closeness/distance
responsibility		

Dame Cicely Saunders

How can the core attitude be described, which encouraged Dame Cicely Saunders to set up the modern hospice movement? What can we learn from her core attitude?

Photo of
Dame Cicely Saunders

© Cicely Saunders International

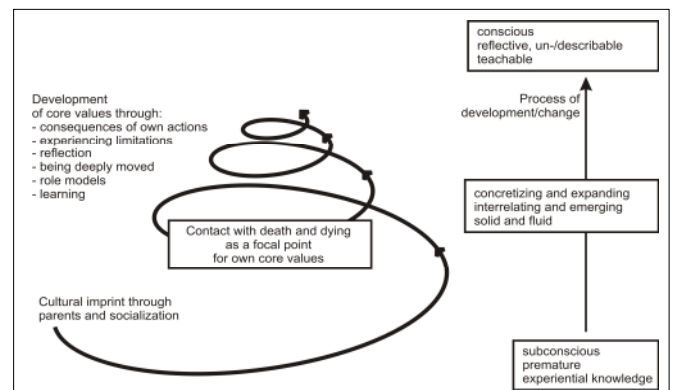


Figure 1 – Development of core attitude

Quotations from the interviews

Personal characteristics

"The core attitude is my own mindset towards life."
(E.D., 54y, chaplain)

Development of core attitude

"The core attitude develops through difficult life crises."
(B.A., 58y, consultant)

Competence in care

"The core attitude is the straightforwardness through which things can happen."
(N.L., 43y, clinical nurse specialist)

"Going in a situation, being present, stepping out again and letting it go."
(D.S., 41y, consultant)

Other expressions associated with 'core attitude'

core value, identity, root, Weltanschauung, fundament/basis, spirituality

Conclusions

In the field of palliative care, 'core attitude' consists of authenticity, manifests itself in relationships, and requires a high degree of perceptiveness.

According to our experience, the different aspects of core attitude could be useful in the field of team work and teaching. However, this has to be analysed in more depth and detail through further research.

Acknowledgements

This study is a part of a research program (including a questionnaire survey with 369 professionals in palliative care) and was supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs in Lower Saxony, Germany.

