



## Stranger at the Gate: Terror Management Theory explains negative perceptions of Palliative Care in Parkinson's Disease

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## **Stranger at the gate! Terror Management Theory explains barriers to palliative care in Parkinson's disease**

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**Background:** Palliative care focuses on the relief of pain and other symptoms experienced in serious illness with the aim of relieving suffering and improving quality of life. Research advocates the introduction of palliative care processes to the care of people with non-malignant progressive conditions, yet evidence suggests that patients are often not informed about this form of care.

**Methods:** Interviews and focus groups were used to collect qualitative data on the experiences of allied health professionals (n=12) social workers (n=13) and former family carers (n=15) who had experience of providing care to people with Parkinson's Disease.

**Findings:** Professional and family carers reported that communication barriers can make discussing the introduction of palliative care with patients with progressive conditions and their families difficult. These barriers can include a wish not to cause distress by broaching the topic of palliative care which might be perceived as synonymous with death and dying. This hesitancy can lead to a lack of referral of such patients to palliative care services.

**Discussion:** Terror Management Theory suggests that people combat the terror of mortality by developing death-denying cultural belief. These findings support this theory in that there was evidence of fear and reluctance to discuss the topic of palliative care with patients despite the knowledge that such care would prove beneficial. Terror Management Theory also proposes that social connectedness and self-esteem may help manage the experience of death anxieties.

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