

ABSTRACT

In order for caregivers to be better able to work with dying patients, they need to confront their fears about their own mortality and explore their feelings about their personal and professional losses. The importance of death anxiety research rests on the premise that death is an eventuality that everyone faces and how health professionals, specifically, deal with death anxiety is of considerable relevance as to the quality of care given to the terminally ill patient.

The purpose of this study was to identify, explore and describe nurses' personal fear of death (death anxiety) and explore whether an association exists between death anxiety and their attitudes towards dying patients in a private acute care hospital in Johannesburg. A quantitative, descriptive correlational survey was conducted to examine the relationship between death anxiety and nurses' attitudes toward terminally ill patients in a private acute care hospital in the province of Gauteng in South Africa.

Various extraneous variables have been identified and defined. No attempt was made to control or manipulate the situation as it was currently occurring. The study population comprised of all nurses working in this hospital who fulfilled the stipulated selection criteria. Data were obtained from nurses through the use of a self-administered questionnaire. The response rate was 42% of the expected population. A total of 93 responses were received. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data and the significance of the relationships between variables was determined using the Fishers exact test (p -value of 0.05).

The findings of this study were consistent to that of similar studies. Findings suggest high levels of death anxiety within the study population with correlating negative death attitudes. This may be associated with the fact that a significant proportion of the study sample was younger and less experienced as opposed to those who demonstrated lower levels of death anxiety and positive death attitudes and were more experienced and older.

A strong association was found between death anxiety and death attitudes. Statistically significant relationships between age and length of nursing experience/exposure were found. No significant relationships between sex, institutional support, death anxiety and death attitudes were found. Of import, the need for ongoing terminal care education was identified in this study.