A Nurse's Study of the Dying Patient and his Family

Introduction:
During the 1960s, the Division of Nursing funded several research studies that focused on the negative impact of technology innovation on institutionalized dying. Some of them were foundational to the emergence of grounded theory and death trajectory research. Another of these studies was an interdisciplinary study of care for the dying and Florence Wald served as the Principal Investigator. Although this study was never fully analyzed, it was foundational to the creation of the first state certified home hospice home care program in America.

Method(s):
Historical data were collected and interpreted using critical social history as a framework. Primary data included archived research transcripts, field notes and research meeting minutes. In-depth interviews were conducted with those integral to the research. Interview audiotapes were transcribed verbatim; generated data were coded, analyzed thematically and contextualized within the historiographical framework of mid-twentieth century healthcare reforms.

Results:
The research diaries and transcripts from this study provide a rare and detailed account of how the group negotiated professional and disciplinary boundaries as they began caring for and advocating on behalf of terminally ill patients within the existing system. The record reflects divergent cultural interpretations of the meaning of illness, place, disciplinary authority and control among professionals, patients and their families. They also reveal a great deal about intra- and interdisciplinary conflicts that arose and how to some nurses, research represented the only role that was left for nursing in health care "without any strings attached to it."

Discussion:
Social history is particularly well suited for examining contemporary health care problems by offering insight into their origins and the possibilities to affect changes. This study provides a more nuanced understanding of the past and its insights are particularly salient to contemporary discourse on health care reforms and what is required of nursing within them.

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