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the use of metaphors in Swedish palliative cancer care

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Published in:
Palliative Medicine

DOI:
[10.1177/0269216316646056](https://doi.org/10.1177/0269216316646056)

2016

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version (aka post-print)

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Hommerberg, C., Gustafsson, A. W., Benzein, E., Sandgren, A., Semino, E., & Koller, V. (2016). Rendering the ungraspable graspable: the use of metaphors in Swedish palliative cancer care. *Palliative Medicine*, 30(6), [PO248]. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269216316646056>

Total number of authors:
6

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Abstract number: PO247
Abstract type: Print Only

Rendering the Ungraspable Graspable - The Use of Metaphors in Swedish Palliative Cancer Care

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Good communication is of utmost importance in all forms of cancer care and especially so in the palliative context. To render the ungraspable graspable, metaphors are frequently used drawing on their capacity to capture the intangible in terms of more familiar experiences. For instance, to die from cancer can be described as “coming to the end of a life journey” or “losing a battle”. Metaphors are largely language and culture specific. Today’s increasingly multicultural societies require particular awareness in order to achieve dignified, individualized palliative cancer care.

This project aims to strengthen the scientific foundation for the use of metaphors in Swedish palliative cancer care. A secondary aim is to compare the use of metaphors in Sweden and the UK in order to reveal differences and similarities. Textual data are collected from a) internet-based blogs, where patients write about their illness-related emotions and experiences while being in palliative care, and from b) interviews with patients, family and health care professionals, where the focus is to investigate what it means to live a dignified life in palliative care. The two sets of data are analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative linguistic methods. First, the Pragglejaz procedure, a well-established linguistic method for metaphor identification, is used in order to manually identify metaphorical expressions in the material, develop analytic categories adapted to the Swedish language data and ensure inter-rater reliability. Second, the material is approached by means of corpus linguistic methods. The combination of research methods is inspired by the UK based MELC project. The data are currently being processed and the first results will be presented at the conference.

The project is funded by The Kamprad Family Foundation Sweden.