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Good death and subjectivity: Governmentality analysis in palliative care

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The study is seeking to explore the dying process as a phenomenon in which relations of power occur in the form of governance of conduct in palliative care settings in Brasilia/Brazil. Findings revealed a real concern from both practitioners and non-practitioners about the quality of death. It became evident that quality of death is a common objective in palliative care practice, but significant differences were found regarding what quality of death means. Analysis of discourse revealed that normative ideas of what a good death is and how to obtain it through palliative care conflicted directly with someone who understood a good death differently. With that said, good death became a contested space between two different cultures. The palliative care practitioners that participated in this study showed that there are tendencies to achieve the best quality of death possible. It also showed a normative narrative of a good death based on the Western palliative care movement. The palliative care narrative of a good death has established a constricted image of what a good death should be transforming it into not only a norm but also in the ultimate objective of palliative care practitioners. We then concluded that the term 'good death' is functioning as a rhetorical device used by practitioners to conduct the patients and their families to achieve a certain way of death.

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