



Art in Reflective Practice: 16 weeks. A patchwork of reflections of a trainee in Palliative Medicine

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16 weeks. A patchwork of reflections of a trainee in Palliative Medicine

From top left to bottom right, a brief explanation of the quilt panels.

1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16

- 1. Remember me, as we were.** Often patients bring photographs into the hospice to show staff how they looked before their illness. They choose to be remembered in the good times, before they were defined by their illness.
- 2. Cold clinical sleep.** This piece represents the contrast between the warmth and welcoming environment of the hospice and the cold, clinical room of the mortuary.
- 3. Existential agony.** Patients with apparently good symptom control can present to the hospice suffering considerably due to spiritual conflict at the end of life. This just highlights the importance of good spiritual care within the multidisciplinary team.
- 4. 'Til death do us part.** Occasionally the hospice is host to a patients wedding in the end stages of life. The hospice can become an important part of patients lives and their choice of a wedding in the hospice is as much about being where you feel most comfortable as through clinical necessity.
- 5. All will turn, to silver glass.** This panel reflects the clouding of the cornea that occurs after death. The title of this panel is a line from 'Into the West', sung by Annie Lennox, a song full of imagery surrounding death.
- 6. Green towels.** It is common for patients who are at risk of a large haemorrhage to be provided with green or other dark towels. This panel reflects on the interplay between red and green.
- 7. Horizon.** The idea of the sea being linked to death has roots in many cultures. The horizon is the point over which we can no longer see, as death is a point in life past which we cannot see.
- 8. Fields of gold.** This panel represents a personal reflection on coming to terms with my own past bereavements during my time in palliative care. 'Fields of gold' was the song chosen by my step-mother for her cremation, and the words 'you'll remember me' echo in my mind each time I hear this piece.
- 9. Sunset.** The sunset is a common example of imagery used when thinking about death, the end of life and movement into the unknown.
- 10. A flower on the pillow.** In the hospice they often place a flower on the pillow of patients after death. The first time I saw this I found it particularly moving, and it was interesting to note how something so simple changed this from a dead body to a person.
- 11. Rose petals.** The husband of a young woman who passed away in the hospice covered her body in rose petals, with his face streaming with tears. This particularly moving act had the nursing staff in the hospice crying with him.
- 12. End to existence.** I spent a significant amount of time with one gentleman in the hospice regarding the fact that he believed after death there was nothing, and that everything he was and is would cease to exist. He wrestled to come to terms with this idea throughout his hospice stay.
- 13. The big needle.** I was asked, quite sincerely, by an elderly lady when she would be getting 'the big needle'. This demonstrates a common misconception in hospice care, that life can and will be ended before its time. It also highlights the ongoing debate regarding physician assisted suicide.
- 14. A patchwork of life.** Life is a complex interplay of the self, those close to us and the wider society. This remains true at the end of life. This panel attempts to display some of that complexity.
- 15. A new life.** I have noted how patients often find comfort in seeing and spending time with young children, and will 'hang on' for the chance to see grandchildren or great grandchildren before they die. There is a comfort from knowing that as one life ends another begins.
- 16. The Poppy.** This is a reflection on how some patients need to find a sense of peace before they pass. A patient spent some weeks in the hospice without much change in his condition. He attended the remembrance service and came back much more settled, and passed away just a few hours later.

Background

Professionals training in palliative medicine are regularly exposed to situations, emotions and concepts that are difficult to express in writing in reflective practice. There has been a move towards alternative methods for reflection that allow these less tangible aspects to be expressed.

Concept and Methods

'16 weeks: Reflections of a trainee in palliative medicine' is a project that explored the use of art, specifically textile art, in the reflective practice of a Core Medical Trainee in a 16 week placement in a hospice. Each week one aspect of the work that struck the trainee was imagined in a piece of textile art using the cyclical process described in the diagram (right). The individual panels were sewn together to form the patchwork quilt.

The resulting artwork is explained in a series of notes for those viewing the quilt (left).

Reflection on art in reflection

The process of producing the textile panels for the quilt was reflected upon by the trainee and summarised in the table (left).

