

LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF THE EASE COURSE – A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES

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1 BACKGROUND



Many people want to help when someone is dying but lack of confidence or knowledge can hold them back. End of Life Aid Skills for Everyone (EASE) was developed by SPPC to help people feel more comfortable supporting others with death, dying and bereavement (SPPC, 2025).

Feedback collected from course participants showed the course increases people’s knowledge and confidence around these issues, but little was known about how this learning endures over time (Patterson et al., 2022). This study explored how past participants experienced and applied EASE learning around 18 months after completing the course.

2 METHODS

This qualitative study was completed as part of an MPH degree at University of Edinburgh. Six participants were interviewed, and data were analysed thematically to explore lasting changes in confidence, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

3 FINDINGS

4 main themes showed how participants’ described EASE’s ongoing impact.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Participants described an improved emotional openness and confidence in talking about death. Many started the course feeling uncertain or unprepared but over time reported a greater ability to face death calmly and with compassion. It enabled feeling less fearful and more at peace with death. For several, this confidence developed when paired with personal experiences (caring/bereavement/illness) and tested what they had learned.

RELATIONAL CONNECTION

The group setting was remembered as one of the most valuable aspects of EASE. Participants described it as a safe and understanding space where they could talk openly about death without judgement. Hearing others’ stories, whether similar or different helped normalise conversations and provided a sense of “permission” to discuss death more comfortably. This shared environment enabled a sense of mutual support, reminding participants that “you’re not alone” in facing mortality. The relational nature of EASE also encouraged confidence to continue these conversations beyond the course, reflecting social learning principles that underpin compassionate community approaches (Noonan et al., 2016; Abel et al., 2018).

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Rather than recalling detailed course content, participants described using what they had learned in small, everyday ways like being more present with others. All participants applied these course principles in either their professional roles and/or personal, family contexts. Also, some noted a wider awareness of end-of-life (EOL) signs and the needs of carers, helping them feel more capable when supporting others. Some participants also undertook advance planning (e.g, power of attorney), linking action with emotional preparedness.

“At first, I saw myself just as a witness. But I started to think about my own experiences too.”

ENDURING IMPACT

EASE was described as “fantastic”. Participants showed an increased acceptance of death and more confidence to act compassionately in EOL situations. Many felt EASE had changed their perspective on their own/society’s discomfort with death. They described how the course continued to “stay with them”, often coming back to mind in later experiences of loss or care. Several noted returning to course materials during later caregiving or bereavement experiences. Some suggested refresher opportunities would help to retain confidence over time.

“Before I might’ve been so consumed...but now, I think, what do they need?”

4 IMPLICATIONS

This study indicated that EASE creates sustained changes in death literacy and confidence. It did not only shape what people know but how they see and respond to death, dying and bereavement.

Group-based and conversational format was essential to create an accessible space for normalising difficult conversations and reflection. Participants reflected on the importance of maintaining these conversations in everyday life.

“I know now exactly where to go...what to do...and therefore would feel happy about sharing that knowledge.”

Participants feel more able to support others and their communities. In this way, EASE contributes to a public health approach to palliative care in Scotland, helping people feel more prepared in the face of death, dying, loss and care.

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