

## 與死亡同行 - 助人者的自我準備

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## Words from Wallace

- It's my fault that I am not able to meet all of you in this symposium: it clashes with my another important event in the university
- One thing that I learn from working with death— courage to acknowledge my limitation;
- Therefore: allow me to send my apology to all of you
- My colleague, Barry will represent me to conduct this presentation

## In this presentation

- Wallace is going to share with you what he has been thinking and working in recent years on the topic of "Self-competence in Death Work"

## Some years ago...

- When Wallace and Agnes conducted training on death and bereavement, we shared one common feeling:
  - The importance of "self" in working with death, dying and bereavement (e.g. how we as a helping professional may cope with our own feelings aroused from our work)

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### BEYOND KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS: SELF-COMPETENCE IN WORKING WITH DEATH, DYING, AND BEREAVEMENT

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*This study explored helping professionals' views on death work competence. A total of 176 helping professionals were invited to state what the necessary core-competencies in death work are. Content analysis was conducted. Results showed that death work competencies can be categorized into 4 major areas: (a) knowledge competencies, (b) practice competencies, (c) self-competencies, and (d) work-environment competencies. Self-competency was the most frequently mentioned by the participants. Self-competency was further categorized into 3 themes: (a) personal resources, (b) existential coping, and (c) emotional coping. Findings reflect helping professionals' emphasis on the role of self and personal preparation in doing death work. Implications on future death education and training for helping professionals were discussed.*

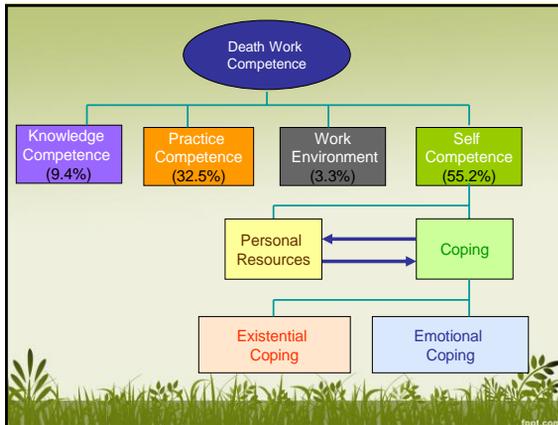
Death is a critical component in the various types of work that helping professionals do, such as counseling dying patients and families, palliative care, advance care planning, crisis intervention, disaster work, and bereavement counseling. The nature of this work is often diverse, the helping professionals performing various roles. For example, a palliative care nurse provides nursing care to advanced cancer patients, and a medical social worker in the accident and emergency department of a hospital provides crisis intervention. Yet, death is the common denominator of these

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- **Self-competence in death work:** coping with the emotional and existential challenges in working with death, dying, and bereavement (Chan & Tin, 2012)

## Chan & Tin (2012)

- 176 helping professionals who do the death work
- One item question: "What do you think are the necessary competencies in performing death work (death work competence)?"



## We decided to further explore...

- Self-competence in death work (SC-DW)
- Three years' project (supported by the General Research Grant of Research Grants Council of Hong Kong)

## Three phases

- Qualitative study: enrich the conceptualization of self-competence in death work
- Validation study: develop and validate a scale to assess SC-DW
- Training workshop: assess the effectiveness of training on enhancing SC-DW

## Phase 1: A qualitative study

## Objective

- This study aims to further explore the impact of death work on the 'self' of palliative care professionals and how they perceive and cope with the challenges of 'self' in death work

## Method

- Interview:
  - E.g. Participants were invited to describe their daily work and were asked to illustrate how it may be different from their previous duties or work in other units, which might open a discussion on the effect of death work on the 'self'.
  - Participants were asked to share their perceived challenges in their work on the self and how they coped with them.

## Participants (palliative care professionals)

- Physicians: 5
- Nurses: 11
- Social workers: 6

## Major themes: challenges & coping

### Self-competence:

reflecting how helping professionals perceive and cope with the challenges on self in death work



Challenges

Coping

## Challenges

Challenges



Existential challenges

Emotional challenges

## Existential challenges

- Shattered basic life and death assumptions
- Three processes (c.f. Shattered assumptions proposed by Janoff-Bulman, 1992) (continue to the next page)



## Existential challenges cont.

Awareness of the nature of life and death



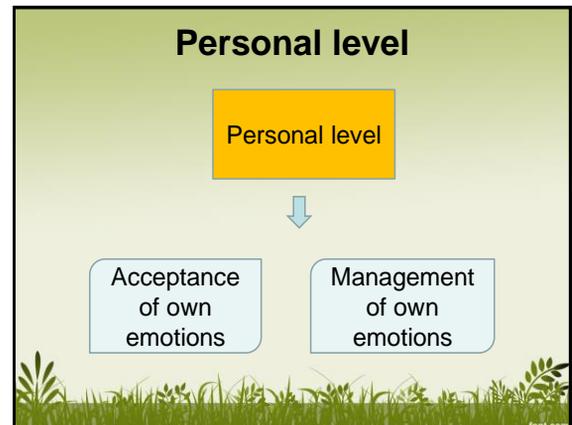
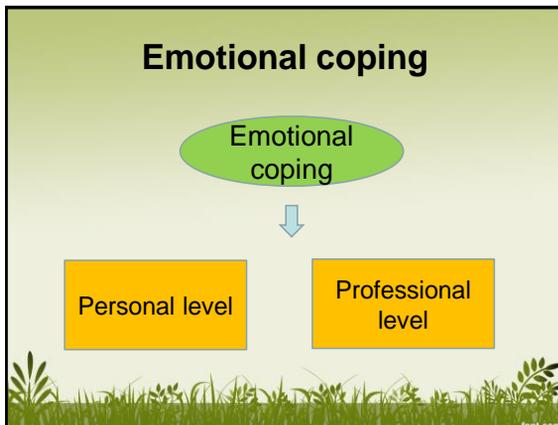
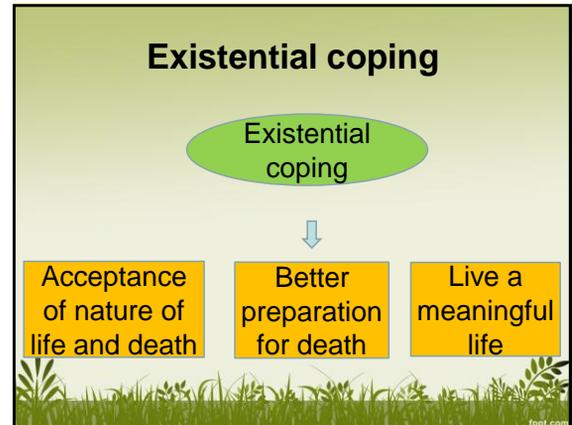
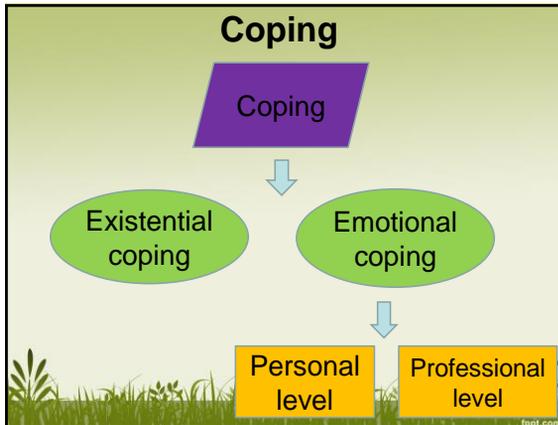
Discrepancy between what they experienced in death work and self-beliefs



Distress/ confusion

## Existential challenges cont.

- Quote 1: "I sometimes feel sorry for my patients (*Distress/ confusion*) why they are unable to achieve an unregrettable life (*Awareness of the nature of life and death*) despite trying very hard. (*Discrepancy between work experience and self-beliefs*) ... This makes me feel unhappy. (*Distress/ confusion*)" (Participant 6)



### Acceptance of own emotions

- Perceive emotional arousal at death work as normal
- Quote: *"I have to accept that when I heard about the difficult situations of my patients or their family, I will get emotional like ordinary people do, even though I am a social work professional."* (Participant20)

### Management of own emotions

- E.g. Dealing with losses and relationship issues
- Quote: *"I am aware of that I have to cope with my emotions before continuing my work ... That means that I have to cope with my guilt over my mother's death, or any other emotion that I have to cope with."* (Participant1)

## Professional level

Professional level

Adjustment of expectations in death work

Search for meaning in work

Differentiation between work and self

Adjustment of expectations in professional identity

## Search for meaning in work

- E.g. Sense of reassurance through finding meaning, or satisfaction and passion in work
- *“To me, this is meaning of work: The patient is touched by or change positively because you have tried hard to help.” (Participant4)*

## Differentiation between work and self

- E.g. Ability to separate work from personal life, so that distress from work does not interfere with personal life and vice versa
- Quote: *“You have to strike a balance. You can't keep yourself too distanced from the patient, but you can't be too involved in your work. That means, you have to separate work and personal life.” (Participant19)*

## Phase 2: Validating a scale

## Based on findings of phase 1

- We develop this scale:
  - The Self-competence in Death Work Scale (16 items)
  - Higher the score, higher the self-competence
  - Two subscales: Existential subscale & Emotional subscale

## Examples

- 以下的句子，有幾符合你現在實際生活及工作中的心態和處境？(而非認知上的對與錯) 請✓出合適的答案。1 非常不符合- 5 非常符合
- 我能夠完全接納生命中有不能控制的部份，例如病人/服務使用者的生死。
- 面對生命的無常，我更珍惜現在所擁有的，並能夠在生活中實踐。
- 我能夠有效地處理自己因工作所引發的情緒。

## Preliminary findings

- 151 helping professionals whose work involved death, dying and bereavement participated
- Correlations of the whole scale and subscales with measures of death attitudes, meaning in life, burnout and depression provided evidence for the construct validity.

## Phase 3

Training workshop

## 「與死亡同行 — 助人者的自我重整與探索」

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## Workshops

- A three-day workshop was developed
- Four workshops were conducted between Feb and May, 2014
- A total of 112 helping professionals joined the workshops

## Evaluation

- A randomized control trial (using waitlist control groups)
- Key measure: self-competence in death work, a measure of death attitudes
- Preliminary analysis: training is effective in enhancing participants' self-competence in death work

## Contents (life and death wall)



### Contents (life and death wall)



### Contents (life and death wall)



### Contents (meaning walk)



### Contents (meaning walk)

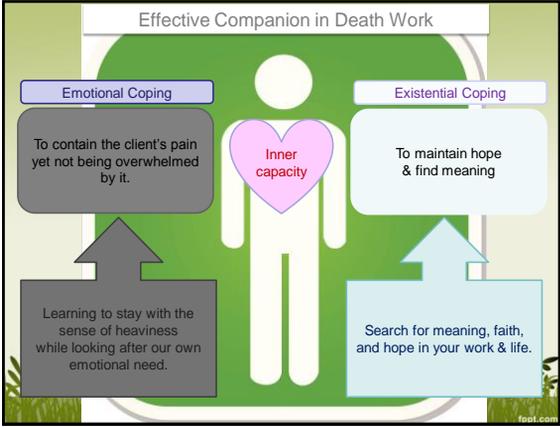


### Contents (meaning walk)



### Professional but personal...





Thank you & Take Care

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(Wallace Chan)

