

“What will I Say?” – Helping prepare final year medical students for working as foundation doctors and speaking with those who are recently bereaved.

Dr Fiona McFatter, Dr Fiona Paterson, Dr Ching Chung, Dr Alana Brown-Kerr; NHS Tayside and School of Medicine, University of Dundee.

Corresponding author; fionamcfatter@nhs.net

Introduction

Foundation doctors care for dying patients and their families. It is important that all health professionals can provide bereavement support and have conversations with bereaved persons.

Research suggests that many newly qualified doctor do not feel well prepared to care for dying patients and talking to bereaved families has been reported by FY1s as being particularly difficult^{1,2}. In addition, in a previous study of foundation doctors 26% had experienced a recent personal bereavement¹. With this in mind we purposefully included a bereavement scenario when developing a new communication skills workshop.



Figure 1; NHS Scotland leaflet “When someone has died – information for you”⁴

Themes of Feedback

Students were given the opportunity to provide free text answers within the feedback. We have explored the themes from each feedback section.

Discussion with relatives about end of life care

- ❖ Opportunity to practice different phrases
- ❖ Beneficial having a simulated patient
- ❖ All students would like the opportunity to practice with the simulated patient
- ❖ This topic is not covered elsewhere in the curriculum
- ❖ Safe space for difficult discussions

Discussion with bereaved relatives

- ❖ Important to learn the practical aspect of what happens after death (mortuary, death certificate, registering a death etc)
- ❖ Students had not previously thought about what happens after death
- ❖ Helpful to think about what bereaved families might wish to know and how to support them

Methods

An End of Life Care Communication skills workshop was integrated into the final year medical course at Dundee medical school in 2017. We discuss a patient with advanced cancer who is dying in hospital. The NES Support Around Death website and video resources³ are highlighted to the students in pre-reading and during the afternoon session (figure 2).

During this half day session, the students have the opportunity to participate in discussions with a patient’s relative before and shortly following their death. The role of the relative is played by experienced “simulated patients” and experienced clinicians and communications tutors provide support and feedback.

The medical students consider how they can provide immediate bereavement support and what they might say. They also consider the practical aspects of care of a person after death. This includes discussion of the NHS Scotland leaflet⁴ “When someone has died – information for you.” (figure 1).

Students were approached for anonymised, written feedback immediately after the session. This was collated and reviewed.



Figure 2; NHS Education for Scotland, Support Around Death website³

Something I have learned from this session is...

- ❖ The importance of taking time for discussions
- ❖ How to look after yourself when caring for the bereaved and the dying
- ❖ Strategies for approaching discussions around death and dying

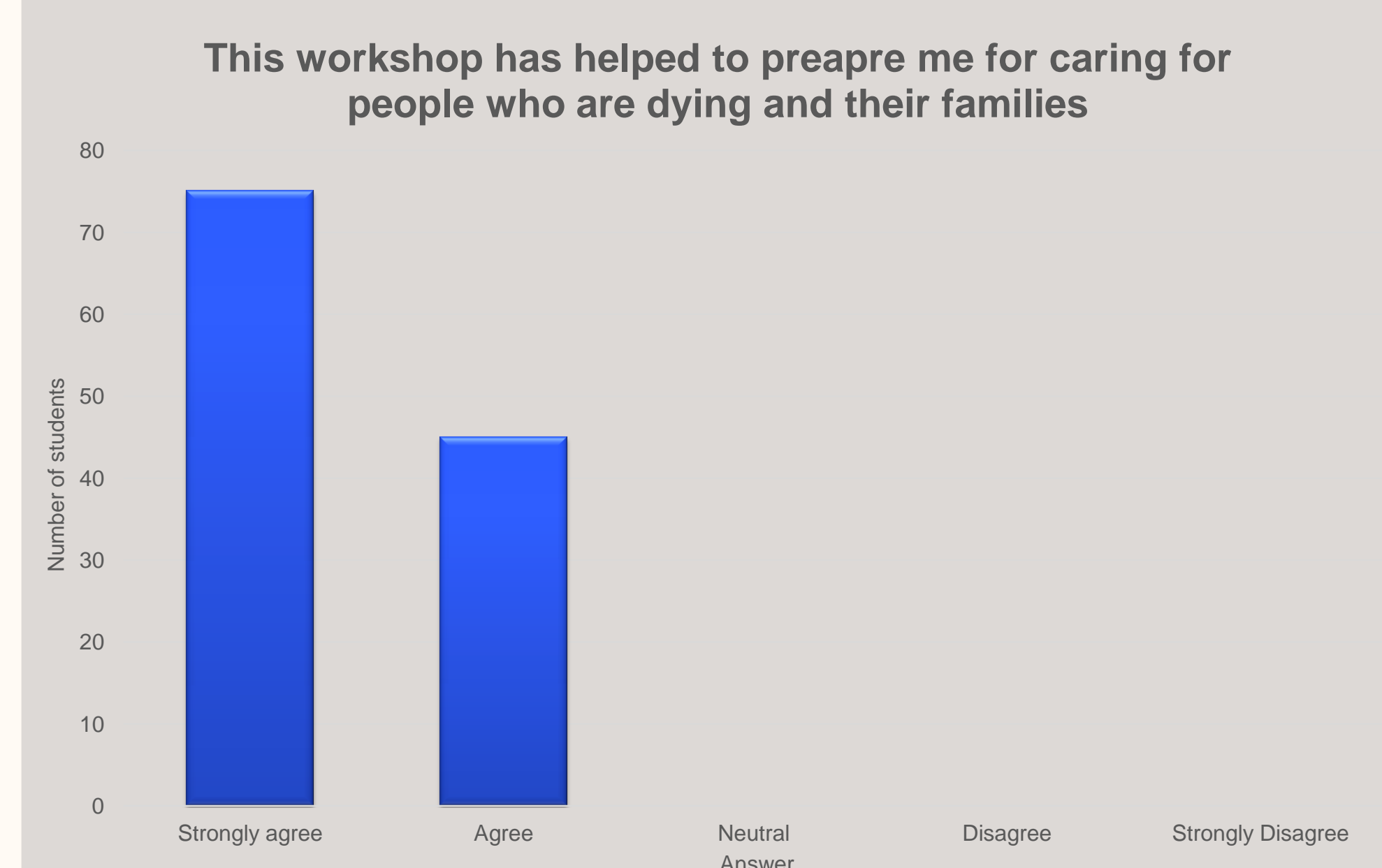
Something I will do differently now is...

- ❖ More confidence in discussing processes after death
- ❖ Give relatives time and space to speak and take time to listen
- ❖ Do not be afraid to use the word “dying”

We also received valuable informal feedback from the volunteer simulated patients, several of whom have experienced a close bereavement. They were able to share their personal experience out with their simulated role.

Results

In the academic year 2018/19, **132 students participated** in the communication skills workshop. Feedback was obtained from 120 students (91%). **77% of students found the bereavement scenario “extremely useful”.**



Discussion

Medical students require increased education related to bereavement. We have described one strategy to achieve this, in the form of a communication skills session for final year medical students. We hope this will contribute to improved outcomes for bereaved persons.

This work is part of an ongoing project related to communication skills and end of life care education in the undergraduate curriculum. We plan to undertake further evaluation of this project including seeking the views of Foundation Doctors who participated in this session as final year medical students.

References

- ¹ Linklater GT. Educational needs of foundation doctors caring for dying patients. *JR Coll Physicians Edinb.* 2010 Mar;40(1):13-8.
- ² Bowden J, Dempsey K, Boyd K, Fallon M, Murray SA. Are newly qualified doctors prepared to provide supportive and end-of-life care? A survey of Foundation Year 1 doctors and consultants. *The journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh.* 2013;43(1):24-8.
- ³ NHS Education for Scotland. Support Around Death [Internet]. Available from: <http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk>
- ⁴ NHS Scotland. What to do when someone has died – information for you. Version 2. June 2016

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank our volunteer Simulated Patients. We also wish to thank PATCH (Palliation and the Caring Hospital) charity for providing funding to support this project.