

Question – I am interested in any references on end-of-life discussions with patients and family members. Or comments from your perspective. More in respect to grief and loss.

[NASW Code of Ethics Standards of Practice](#) in Palliative and End of Life Care addresses:

Roles for social workers at the end of life include:

- Enhancement of quality of life for patient and caregiver.
- Promoting autonomy and self-determination.
- Respecting cultural, religious, and spiritual beliefs.
- Address pain and symptom management as a holistic practice;
- Work with bereavement, grief, and trauma.

Social Worker should be trained in or pursue advanced training in:

- End of life issues including biological, ethical, and legal;
- Health care proxy or surrogate decision making;
- Withdrawal or withholding treatment such as termination of ventilator supports, withdrawal of fluids and nutrition, and physician aid in dying or pain management;
- Should be aware of proposed death with dignity legislation.

Common interventions for hospice and palliative care workers use:

- Counseling: individual, family, crisis intervention
- Psychoeducation
- Encourage expression of emotions (validate and normalize), effective communication and coping mechanisms
- Support groups (online or in person)
- Bereavement support
- Case management and discharge planning
- Resource management (caregiver support, financial and legal guidance, advanced directives, transitional care options)
- Advocacy/navigation of systems and empowerment.

Communication with patients at the end of life should focus on:

- Providing clinical care that supports the patient's and family's values and beliefs;
- Listening to the patient's experience and meanings they ascribe to the disease and dying process:
 - Being present
 - Paying attention to verbally spoken words and non-verbal cues

Grief Counseling focuses on:

- Normalizing feelings and behaviors
- Helping the griever identify and express his or her feelings
- Actualizing the loss
- Providing continued support throughout the process

Grief and Loss Resources:

- [CSWE Grief, Loss and Bereavement in Older Adults Teaching Module](#)
- [CSWE Coping with Loss and Grief with an Older Woman](#) – Teaching Module
- Free Social Work Tools and Resources: [Social Work toolbox.com](#)
- [Centering & Grief digest Magazine](#) (and resources)

Palliative care and end-of-life trainings (NOTE: this is not an exhaustive list of programs)

- [Palliative Care Skills for Social Workers and Counselors](#) – online education through California State University
- [Palliative and End-of-Life Care training](#) – Silver School of Social Work NYU (currently online)
- [Palliative and End-of-Life Care Certificate](#) – Smith College School for Social Work
- [Post-MSW Palliative Care social Work Certificate](#) – Hospital Association of Southern California
- More resources CEU/trainings can be found here: [Social Work Hospice & Palliative Care Network \(SWHPN\)](#)

Advance certification through the NASW: [Advanced Certified Hospice & Palliative Social Worker](#)

Reference:

- Gehlert, S & Browne, T. (2019). *Handbook of Health Social Work*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.