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Oral abstract submission

Title: Fostering employee gentleness through organisational routines and resources in palliative care

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Abstract

Background: Little is known about employee gentleness, even though it is a type of caregiving that is valued by patients and likely to play an important role in the provision of high-quality care. The aims of this study are to define employee gentleness and to understand how it is fostered in caregiving contexts.

Methods: Data were derived from an interview-based and an ethnographic study of a hospice day care centre. The data, collected by a team of researchers, is based on 60 days of observation and 30 semi-structured interviews of staff and patients. The focus of the data collection and analysis has been on how employees account for, make sense of, and enact gentleness in their work.

Results: Analysis revealed employee gentleness to be a form of care giving with three key characteristics a) a soft and slow approach, e.g., soft voice and touch, patience b) dynamic affiliation behaviour, i.e., 'friendly guidance and attentiveness' to direct the care process and 'warm responsiveness' to react compassionately to patient need c) regulating patient affect.

Employee gentleness was fostered by organisational caregiving routines (including enquiry routines, e.g., patient assessments; attention routines, e.g., collective note reading; emotion routines, e.g., collective framing) and organisational resources such as job autonomy, social support and organisational norms about intimacy and emotion.

Implications: The results, from the first empirical-based study of employee gentleness, can help organisations consider how their formal and informal organisational care routines foster care giving and employee gentleness.