

The Reflection Room®: Moving from death-denying to death-discussing

Thinking about dying and death is something we tend not to do, and those who promote Advance Care Planning for our last days, hours and minutes would like us to do more. How could we go from being a death-avoiding society to a death-discussing society?

The Reflection Room® project asks if the power of storytelling and sharing experiences engages people in thinking and talking about dying, death, and grief. The Reflection Room® has shown that a space for storytelling can be used as part of a grieving process for people, or as part of remembering, celebrating, teaching, learning, and connecting. Stories of experiences, regrets, gratitude – and sometimes ‘letters’ to those who have died – appear to increase comfort with discussing dying and death.

Project Overview

We know that fear and denial are very real aspects of how Canadians relate to dying, death and grief. Thus, many people have not had important conversations about their end of life wishes.

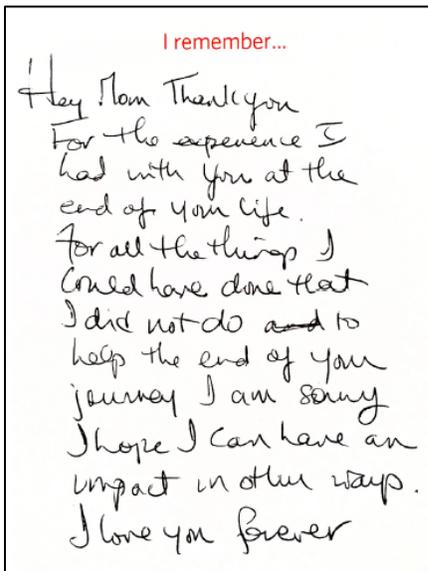
Those who promote Advance Care Planning for the health care in our last days, hours and minutes would like us to do more. However, planning requires us to think about how we want to live our final days and then share those wishes with others.

Human beings are storytellers. We proposed that providing places for storytelling — and places for reading the stories of others — might trigger more thinking and break through the social complexity that can be a barrier to discussing dying, death and grief. This research proposes the question: Does setting aside a place for sharing stories help to move people from death-avoiding to death-discussing or even death-accepting?

The first Reflection Room® was installed in 2015. Building on previous research in spiritual care, we wanted to create an immersive experience and space for reflection.

Over the course of the last 3 years, many visitors to the Reflection Room® have had the opportunity to take a few quiet moments, as well as to write reflections on a card and pin it to a ribbon wall.

As of December 2018, the Reflection Room® has been installed in 33 settings in 5 provinces across Canada, both in public and health care environments. More than 800 stories have been left in the Reflection Room®. After each installation, reflection cards are scanned, transcribed and posted to TheReflectionRoom.ca.



Reflection from installation at the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association Conference in Ottawa, October, 2015

In the first phase of this study (2015-2017), we found that where and how the Reflection Room® created space and time for people was important. We learned that some settings appeared to be more conducive for people to engage, and others settings less so. Length and style of installation seemed to make a difference.

What are we doing now?

In an extension of the original Reflection Room® research project, we are creating longer-term Reflection Room®

How was the research funded?

This research was funded by the SE Research Centre.

Researchers

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installations across Canada and continuing to build the website – where people are invited to write their stories about dying and death and read the stories of others. In this second phase, installations will be no less than one month in duration and will be designed based more along the lines of some of the "art gallery-inspired" installations of the Reflection Room® in the first phase.

Innovative approach

The design of the Reflection Room® focused on creating a welcoming and relaxing environment and many elements within the room, such as the use of sound for relaxation and the inclusion of elements of nature, were based on themes that emerged from an earlier spirituality research project. With the spirituality research in mind, the Reflection Room was also designed to be an immersive experience informed by the process of generative design research and public art, drawing from public art/engagement installations by the artist, Candy Chang.

What is the impact?

Visit TheReflectionRoom.ca to read reflections from our installations across Canada.

About the SE Research Centre

The SE Research Centre is funded by SE Health to conduct impact-oriented health services research and evaluation for the benefit of Canadians. We study the needs of people, their caregivers, and health care providers, to develop evidence-based solutions to tough health and social care problems. Our researchers collaborate with a wide variety of community and academic partners across Canada.

In the SE Research Centre there are four fields of research and evaluation: Aging in Society; Dying, Death and Grief; Health and Care Experiences; and Models of Care Delivery.

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