

untapped



The arts and their potential in palliative care

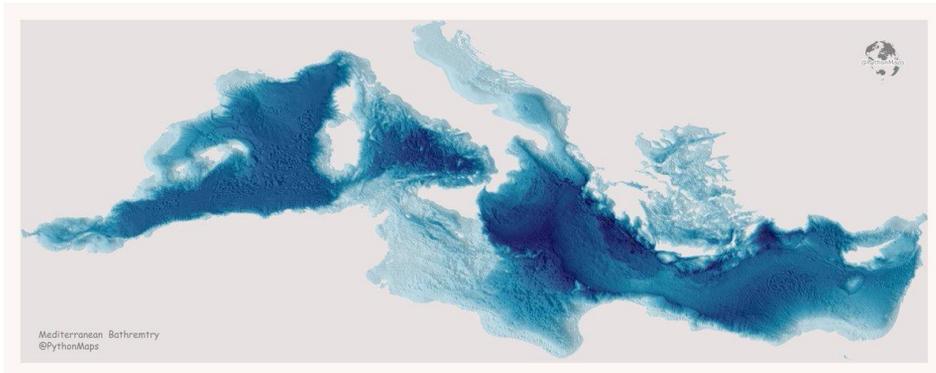
Outcomes, pitfalls and the need to reimagine interdisciplinarity

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Director of Education, Research & Creative Arts, St Columba's Hospice Care
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1



Tsisris, G. (2017). Music therapy and spirituality: An international survey of music therapists' perceptions. *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, 26(4), 293-319.

Tsisris, G., & Ceccato, E. (2020). Our sea: Music therapy in dementia and end-of-life care in the Mediterranean region. *Approaches: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music Therapy*, 12(2).

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The arts in palliative care

- ✓ Long history in palliative care
- ✓ Established and growing evidence base
- ✓ Increased numbers of practitioners
- ✓ Multifaceted contribution (care, environment, legacy, community engagement etc.)
- ✓ Diversified practices and collaborative work

- ✓ Lack of palliative care specific training
- ✓ Part-time & voluntary or short-term posts
- ✓ Working in isolation
- ✓ Weak integration in multidisciplinary teams
- ✓ Limited strategic investment
- ✓ Ongoing misperceptions



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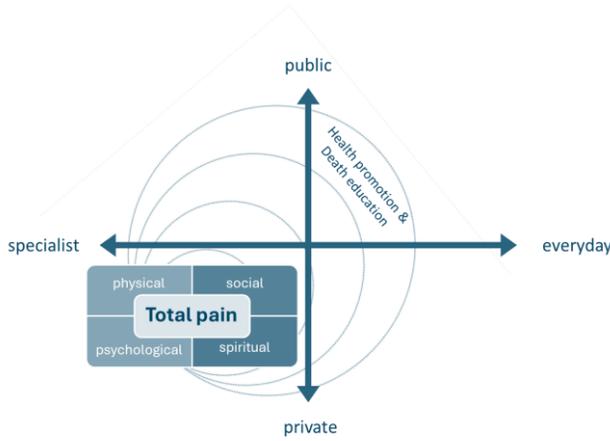
Hartley, N. (2018).
When the artist becomes leader...
 some thoughts.
 EAPC Blog.

“Firstly, I think there are common misconceptions about artists and musicians as being undisciplined. Creativity is often viewed as being able to ‘wing it’, to ‘play it by ear’, and sometimes we are viewed as a little ‘fluffy around the edges’. On the contrary, as a musician I spent hours perfecting my craft, studying music and technique in a microscopic way, much like the discipline and craft of a doctor. With such fine, detailed examination of music, I learned to be the best I could be. I also learned about order and control, about the benefits of repetition and also of assessing risk. As an improvising musician, I know about the opportunities that come with what, in other professions, might be thought of as mistakes. In music, mistakes offer opportunities for different direction, for potential and new ways forward.”



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Total pain... total care...



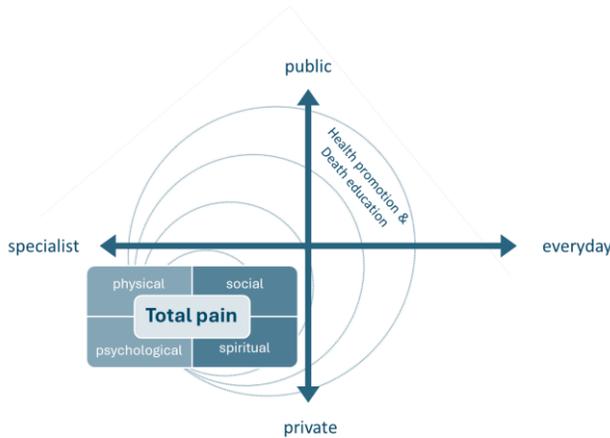
The hospice movement and beyond...

Contemporary developments

- future care planning
- assisted dying
- AI & technology

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Total pain... total care... total arts



Tsiris et al. (2022). Musical care at the end of life: Palliative care perspectives and emerging practices. In *Collaborative insights: Interdisciplinary perspectives on musical care throughout the life course*. OUP.

Video QR code



Kleijberg et al. (2020). Death, loss and community—perspectives from children, their parents and older adults on intergenerational community-based arts initiatives in Sweden. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 28(6).

Tsiris, G. (2024). 'GRESKO Agape' – An international songwriting project for hospice patients and school children. In *Music therapy at the end of life*. Jeffrey Books.



Tsiris et al. (2011). Music and arts in health promotion and death education: The St Christopher's Schools Project. *Music and Arts in Action*, 3(2).

van Laarhoven, H. W., & van Poecke, N. (2024). In search of stories: narrative-aesthetic interventions to hear cancer patients' voices. *EClinicalMedicine*, 76.

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“The story of dying in the 21st century is a story of paradox”

The Lancet Commission on the Value of Death:
 bringing death back into life
<https://valueofdeath.org>

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music (and the arts)

“The story of ~~dying~~ in the 21st century is a story of paradox”

“ ... the really rich and nuanced ‘big’ question of how music works [...] is perhaps not well addressed from the vantage point of medicalised discourses. We think in part this is because a great deal of the research that seeks to ‘test’ what music does begins with an overly medicalised understanding of health and an overly individualised understanding of well-being and that neither of these understandings leave sufficient space for understanding health/illness and well-being as emergent, temporally and situationally varying, phenomenological and relational entities.

By contrast, we suggest that health and well-being be subsumed under the concept of flourishing [...] it is possible to ‘be flourishing’ while nearing death, mentally deranged, or in pain (for example, one may remain in, or even gain, excellent spiritual health, still love and be loved, be communicatively at one’s best, feel life’s sweetness as never before, or take comfort in the ways that family and friends have bonded because of one’s condition).

Thus, as a working definition, we understand flourishing as something that goes beyond individuals and discreet physical indicators to encompass the interconnections between people and their environments, understood as a reciprocal, ecological relation. ”

DeNora, T., & Ansdell, G. (2014).
What can't music do?
Psychology of Well-being, 4(1).

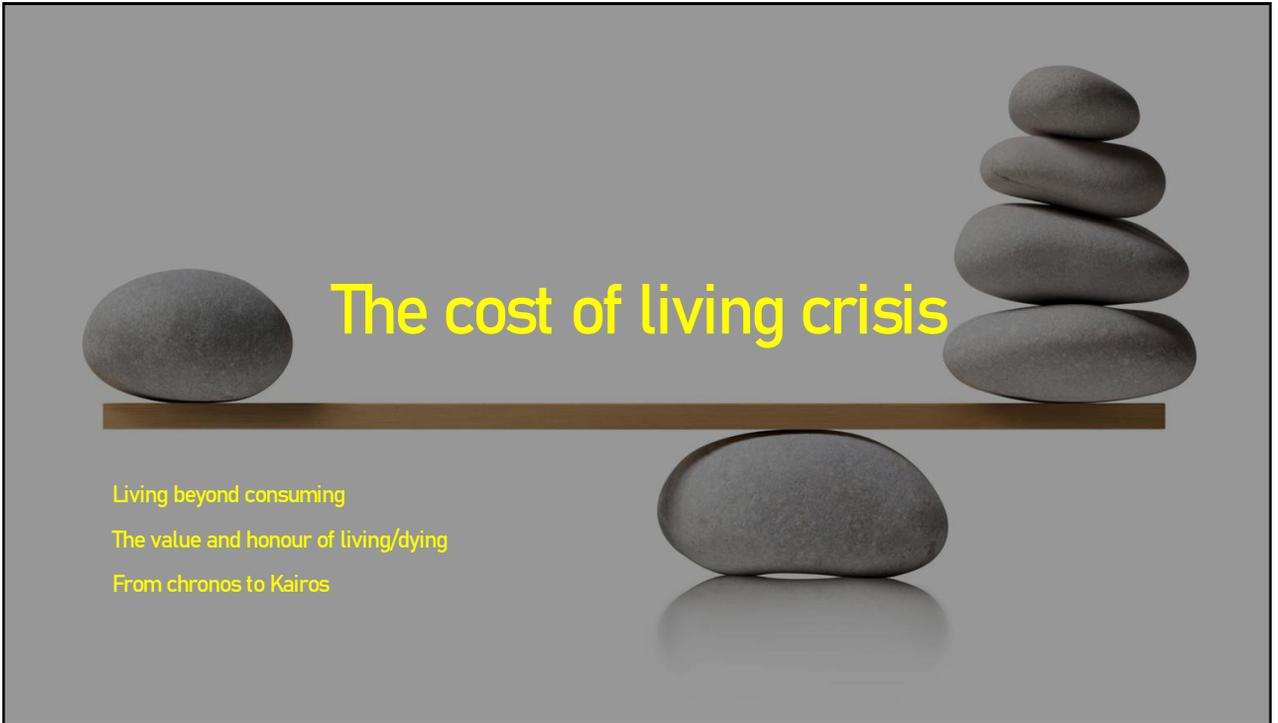
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The beauty of living, ageing and dying

© Hospice Photography – The last day in my dad's life

<https://www.lookslikefilm.com/2019/01/04/hospice-photography/>

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End of Life Care
A GUIDE FOR THERAPISTS, ARTISTS AND ARTS THERAPISTS
NIGEL HARTLEY

“One of the tragic consequences of our death-denying culture is that just when people most need social support, the world often retreats from them in embarrassment, anxiety and dismay, creating a kind of social death long before physical demise occurs”

Barbara Monroe (2014)

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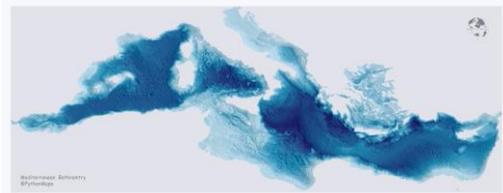
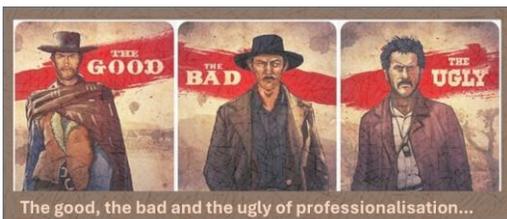
“Although the hospice movement has been successful in influencing attitudes in medicine and healthcare professions towards death and dying, one of its major failings has been in **changing public attitudes**. [...] A current and future responsibility, therefore, must be to address this issue and work with communities of people to **integrate healthily the concepts of dying and death into their everyday lives**.”
(Hartley, 2008, pp. 34–35)

How the arts can support a new vision
for hospice and palliative care...

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Towards palliative arts

A colourful and complex landscape



Emerging areas

- Curating the care environment & organisational wellbeing
- Community engagement & capacity building
- Co-production, equity & arts-based methodologies

Tsiris, G., & Lee, J. B. (2025). The arts in palliative care: Critical perspectives on evidence and practice. In *Research Handbook on End of Life Care and Society* (pp. 336-352). Edward Elgar Publishing.



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Towards palliative arts

Emerging areas

- Curating the care environment & organisational wellbeing
- Community engagement & capacity building
- Co-production, equity & arts-based methodologies

Some examples

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No Barriers Here is a unique and innovative approach to advance care planning for people and communities who experience inequity accessing palliative and end of life care.



Working with LGBTQ+ People in Palliative and End-of-Life Care



Jerwood, J., & Allen, G. (2025). The development of C-CARE-an arts-based, co-produced research methodology for understanding and addressing inequalities in healthcare. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 24.

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Studying Music in Late Life, End of Life, All of Life

Care for Music

Why? And How? Research People What do you know? 🎧

Music Helps –



The old clock face, Hill House

Music in Time

Music in Place

Music Between



ISLAND LIFE AND DEATH studying cultural change around death, dying and bereavement

Project Diary Community Resources Essays

16th Jun 2025 · Uncategorized

IMAGINE

Imagine!

Tia visits the IMAGINE hut during Festspillene, May 2025...





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'Dying in the Margins': From Study Findings to Policy Changes

Published on: April 9, 2024 Author: samquinn Leave a comment



Photograph of Stacey with her mum on the sofa bed in the living room, by Margaret Mitchell (@Margaret Mitchell)



The photos that chronicle the cost of dying

By 20 April 2023






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The arts and their potential in palliative care

- Continuity of 'clinical' and 'non-clinical' processes and outcomes
- Healthy and unhealthy uses of the arts
- Careful art & Artful care (James, 2023)
- Expanded notions of 'care'
- Palliative arts in everyday life and practice
- Interdisciplinary collaboration
- Culturally sensitive palliative care (Ntizimira et al., 2022)

Ntizimira, C., Deo, M. S., Dunne, M., & Krakauer, E. (2022). Decolonizing end-of-life care: lessons and opportunities. *ecancermedicalscience*, 16, ed121.

Thompson, J. (2022). *Care aesthetics: for artful care and careful art*. Routledge.

Open Access Article

The Arts Therapies in Palliative and End-of-Life Care: Insights from a Cross-Cultural Knowledge Exchange Forum

by John F. Mondanaro ¹, Bruce Armstrong ², Sally McRae ², Edith Meyerson ¹, Todd O'Connor ³ and Giorgos Tsiris ^{2,4}

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stay tuned!

#PalliativeArts
#StColumbasArts

Palliative Arts **No.17 Talks**

Friday 24th April 2026, 6pm (UK-time)
On the art of palliative medicine

Christian Rhodius

Friday 31st July 2026, 6pm (UK-time)
Bringing culture and health policies together in the European Union: Connecting the dots in advocacy

Kornelia Kiss

Friday 30th October 2026, 6pm (UK-time)
Ethics, empathy, and the human condition

Margaret Mitchell

the social biobehavioural research group

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The 7th Annual International Symposium for the Arts in Palliative Care

20th November 2026 #StColumbasArts #PalliativeArts

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untapped
↓
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Outcomes, pitfalls and the need to reimagine interdisciplinarity

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Thank you!

St Columba's Hospice Care

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EDINBURGH