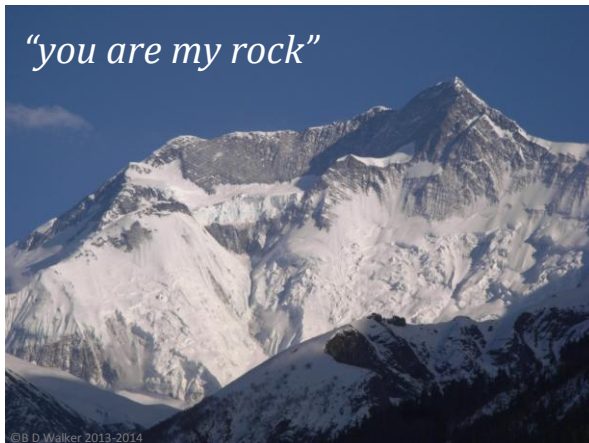


Project findings

What have we found so far?

Here are some of our initial findings:

- For hospice managers, a 'good' death involves 'peace' and 'open' conversations.
- A 'bad' death may involve 'struggling' and 'fighting', and problems in a 'place' inside the patient that hospice staff are not allowed to 'reach'.
- Family carers often say that their emotions can only be safely 'released' when talking to people who are 'in the same boat'.
- 'Battle' metaphors are frequently used by all three groups involved in our study - patients, family carers and health professionals.
- In the language used by patients, some 'battle' metaphors seem to contribute to negative emotions: e.g. 'I feel such a failure that I am not winning this battle'.
- In other cases, they seem to have an empowering effect: e.g. 'My consultants recognized that I was a born fighter'.



Who are we?

The Metaphor in End of Life Care project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The project team includes staff from three faculties at Lancaster University:

Professor Elena Semino
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Professor Sheila Payne
(Division of Health and Medicine)

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We also have an external collaborator at The Open University:

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Project website

If you would like to know more about the Metaphor in End of Life Care project, please visit our website:

<http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/melc/>



Metaphor in End of Life Care

ESRC Project ES/J007927/1



More about the Metaphor in End of Life Care project at Lancaster University

What is the Metaphor in End of Life Care project about?

The project investigates the use of metaphor in the experience of end-of-life care in the UK. We are analysing the metaphors used by members of different groups involved in end-of-life care (patients, unpaid family carers and healthcare professionals) in a 1.5-million-word collection (or 'corpus') of interviews and online forum contributions.

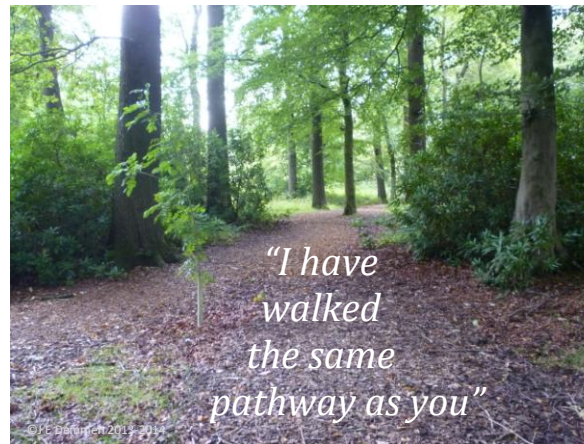
"It's been a rollercoaster of emotions"

"it's just another hurdle to get over"

"this is a marathon and not a sprint"

"Did you find your journey a battle?"

"into the sausage machine we go"



What is metaphor?

Metaphor involves talking and thinking about one thing in terms of another. When we say that someone died after a 'battle' with cancer, we talk about being ill and attempting to get better in terms of a military operation. When we say that someone has 'passed away', we talk about dying in terms of going away from where we are.

Metaphors are frequently used to talk about subjective, abstract, complex and/or sensitive experiences in terms of physical, concrete, simple and less sensitive experiences. For example, we talk about our lives in terms of journeys, death in terms of departure, time in terms of space, our minds in terms of machines, and so on. The metaphors we choose both reflect and affect how we 'see' what we are talking about. If we talk about being ill with cancer in terms of a journey, for example, we may see our experience differently than if we talk about it in terms of a battle. Different metaphors may be more or less appropriate for different people, or for the same person at different times.

"Keep up your fighting spirit"

"try and rest and switch off"

"don't beat yourself up"

Why study metaphor in end-of-life care?

Illness, emotions, relationships and death are among the experiences that we often talk about using metaphor. The metaphors we use express, reflect and shape our views, feelings, attitudes and needs.

Metaphors can both help and hinder communication, depending on how compatible our metaphors are with those of others, and on how sensitive we are to our own use of metaphor and to the metaphors that are used by other people. The metaphors used by different groups of people in end-of-life care (in our case, patients, family carers and health professionals) can tell us something about their views, feelings, attitudes and needs, and about the extent to which these are similar or different across groups.

A better understanding of people's uses of metaphor can help to identify possible sources of misunderstanding, and to improve communication involving members of different groups.

"Soldier on everybody."