

# Study on ethical dilemmas and countermeasures of hospice care service from the perspective of ecosystem

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**Abstract:** Hospice care originated in the West, is a combination of sociology, ethics, medicine, psychology and other disciplines to develop a new career. In recent years, people's demand for hospice services is increasing, but the hospice cause still faces many ethical dilemmas. From the perspective of ecosystem, based on literature retrieval and integration, this paper extracts relevant data from literature information, and makes a quantitative analysis of the current research hotspots of hospice care, annual distribution of literature, authors, keywords, published journals, etc., combining professional methods of social work and under the guidance of ecosystem theory. The development status of hospice care and its many dilemmas were explored and studied. This research has a certain theoretical and practical significance, hoping to have a deeper understanding of the provision of hospice care services and ethical dilemmas in the social scope, and can promote the development of hospice care services in our country to a certain extent.

**Key words:** hospice care; Ecosystem perspective; Literature approach; Ethical dilemmas; Quantitative analysis

## 1. Introduction

Hospice care is a multidisciplinary and comprehensive medical service aimed at relieving the physical and psychological pain of terminally ill patients and their families and making them face death calmly. With the aging population and the increasing number of chronic disease patients in our country, hospice care, as a special care service, can not only improve the quality of life of patients and safeguard human dignity, but also reduce the medical burden of the country and family, which is an inevitable social development. The ecosystem theory emphasizes the adaptability between people and the environment, and requires the individual and the environment to constantly adapt to each other, by changing the influencing factors in the environment and then from the micro, medium and macro levels to carry out their own changes. From the perspective of ecosystem theory, this study will conduct a quantitative analysis of research hotspots, annual distribution of literature and authors in the field of hospice care through literature retrieval and integration, extract relevant data, and combine professional methods of social work to comprehensively analyze the ethical dilemmas and influencing factors faced by hospice care. It is hoped that this study can explore how to improve the public's understanding of death and hospice care services and countermeasures to improve ethical dilemmas, so as to play a complementary and constructive role in the theoretical research and development of hospice care.

## 2. Based on the literature method to quantify the research status of hospice care services in China

### 2.1 Data and methods

This study focuses on the analysis of academic journals, excluding dissertations, conferences, books, and government documents. By using CNKI platform as the method of literature retrieval, the first search was conducted through the CNKI database. The publication time was between January 2013 and May 2023. The article topic was "hospice care", and the synonym extension was carried out, the Chinese mode was selected, and the other Settings were not changed. Secondly, the search topic was refined. In the search results, the literature with the theme of "hospice care + ethics" was retrieved again, and a total of 127 articles in academic journals under this theme were retrieved. Finally, the search results were quantified and visualized on the relevant literature by using the Knownet platform, and the results were presented in the form of charts.

### 2.2 Result analysis

#### 1. Annual trend statistics

According to the literature information statistics on the cumulative number of published papers in the past ten years, and combined with the statistical curve, it can be obviously found that from 2013 to 2019, the number of published papers related to "hospice care" and "hospice care + ethics" in China is on the rise, while from 2019 to 2023, the number of published papers on related topics is on the decline (see Figure 1). The reason for the decline at this stage is related to the previous social environment, but this factor affects people's concept of life and death, and also promotes the development of the field of hospice care to a certain extent.

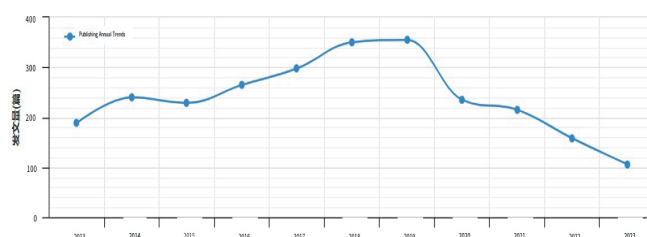
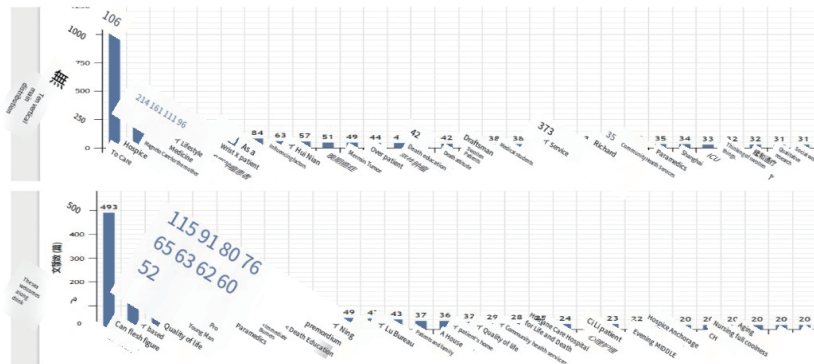


Figure 1 Annual trend of thematic literature publication

## 2. Subject statistics of literature research

The statistics of literature research topics are mainly divided into main topics and secondary topics (see Figure 2). Through the analysis of the figure, we can find that hospice care is the most frequent topic in scholars' research. In addition, the key words that people pay more attention to are hospice patients, hospice nursing and quality of life. These three keywords account for a large proportion in the main and secondary topics, but there is almost no research on the topic of hospice ethical words.



**FIG. 2** Distribution of topics in literature

### 3. Literature author statistics

In this study, two authors, Shi Yongxing (16 articles) and Fu Jing (11 articles), were identified as the first authors who published more than 10 articles on hospice care. There were 16 who published 5-10 articles; And 12 published five or fewer articles. Five published more than three articles on the topic “Hospice + Ethics” as first author.

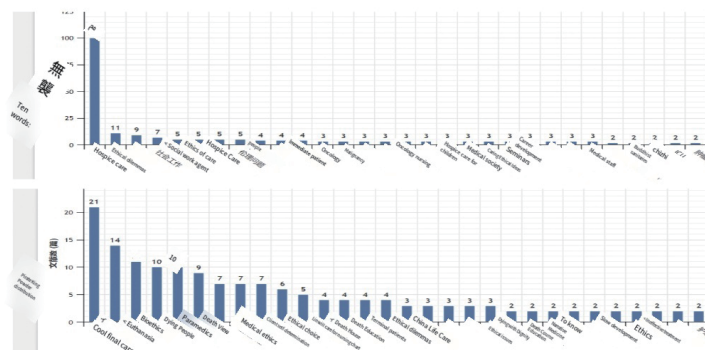
#### 4. Subject distribution and source statistics of literature

According to the statistics of discipline distribution of literature retrieved, clinical medicine (60.28%) accounts for the largest proportion of discipline distribution, followed by medical education and medical fringe science (10.02%), sociology and social work only account for a very small proportion, and social work is gradually playing an increasingly important role in the field of hospice care. We should help hospice care develop better from the perspective of social work.

According to the statistics of the source journals, the top three journals with high frequency are nursing research (13.48%), Chinese medical psychology (12.25%), and Medicine and philosophy (12.25%). Most of the literatures come from medical journals.

### 3. Ethical dilemmas and countermeasures of hospice care services from the perspective of ecosystem

In the statistics of “hospice + ethics” related literature research topics, there are relatively more studies on ethical dilemmas and ethical thinking in the main topics, and more studies on euthanasia, client self-determination and life-and-death concepts in the secondary topics (see Figure 3). For the analysis of the above research hot topics, we can roughly divide the ethical dilemmas of hospice care services into the following aspects: the dilemma of traditional concepts, the dilemma of informing and concealing, and the dilemma of whether to continue treatment.



**Figure 3. Literature topic statistics of “hospice care + ethics”**

### 3.1 Analysis of the ethical dilemmas of hospice services

### 1. The dilemma of traditional concepts

In our traditional concept of life and death, we have created many words to euphemistically express death. People will avoid mentioning death, because it is always associated with grief, fear and so on. At present, most people are still influenced by the traditional concepts of life and death and avoid thinking about death, so only a few groups pay attention to the field of hospice care. In addition, the traditional culture of filial piety and medical culture also have a certain influence on the development of hospice care. Maybe the family members know that

treatment has only a very small hope of survival, and the patients themselves may also oppose the continuation of treatment. The family will still not give up. Similarly, the professional concept of doctors is to maintain the lives of patients through various medical means, and they take saving lives as the primary task, but hospice care pays more attention to the quality of life. These traditional concepts collide with modern development, resulting in unavoidable ethical dilemmas.

## 2. Dilemma of informing and concealing

For a critically ill patient, whether to tell them the real condition, is a difficult choice for all family members and medical staff, in the face of such a situation, everyone will choose to hide, whether it is family members or medical staff, they are afraid that the patient's psychological unbearable, resulting in their despair and pessimism to refuse treatment. But this may also ignore the needs of patients themselves, in the final stage patients may not want to endure the suffering of continuous treatment, and want to leave in a calm and soothing way, so for the terminal patient is really informed or conceal the condition has become an ethical dilemma troubling everyone.

## 3. Continuous treatment or not dilemma

With the continuous development of medical technology, in the process of clinical practice, doctors can use medical devices and various drugs to prolong the life of patients as much as possible. At present, there is no clear boundary for whether patients need continuous treatment. If doctors blindly maintain the life of patients through medical technology, they may bring patients more physical and mental pain. Therefore, how to judge and decide whether to continue treatment has also formed an ethical dilemma.

### 3.2 Countermeasures and suggestions

#### 1. Micro level

Attach importance to life education and correctly understand life and death. The purpose of life education is to help understand the meaning and value of life, view the relationship between life and death correctly, and establish a correct view of life. It includes all aspects of the whole process from birth to death, which is related to both the growth of human life and the development value of human. China's traditional culture is broad and diversified, we should inherit and develop the traditional culture should be rational, we should attach importance to life education, through life education to correctly understand life and death, rational view of life and death. We should not only pay attention to the quality and value of life, but also face death with a calm attitude.

#### 2. Meso-level

Widely absorb professionals and expand the hospice care team. The development of hospice care service in China not only needs a complete theory and system, but also needs a large number of professional talents. The hospice service team includes personnel from various fields, such as doctors, nutritionists, psychologists, etc., and the personnel in each field work together to provide services. We can recruit professional medical social workers, who can give full play to their professional advantages in the team and provide diversified support. We should also set up a professional volunteer team, and provide professional education and training for volunteers to encourage them to actively participate in hospice care work.

#### 3. Macro level

Strengthen the emphasis on hospice care and enhance public awareness. First of all, we should increase the publicity of hospice care, give full play to the positive guiding role of the government, popularize relevant concepts, and invite practitioners in this field to give speeches; We can also shoot hospice themed propaganda films to publicize to the public through camera records. Secondly, the government should also increase support for hospice institutions, strengthen training for related personnel, improve welfare benefits, and call on charitable resources for special funding. Finally, in terms of policies, the government should formulate relevant laws and regulations and audit systems, clarify the charging standard of hospice care services and the qualification certificates of practitioners and institutions, and explore localized, standardized and professional hospice care service models according to local conditions.

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