

## TITLE

When Death Comes Knocking at the Door: Honoring End-of-Life Work in a Social Work Field Placement

## CONTINUING EDUCATION HOURS

2 hours

## GOALS

The universal experience of death has the potential to connect human beings on a deeper level. Yet our denial of death often inhibits human connection and relationship. The field of palliative and end-of-life care therefore presents an array of challenges to social work interns. Feelings of vulnerability surrounding our patients' death and our own mortality can evoke a sense of helplessness and contribute to professional stress and burnout. Field placements are not always prepared to address these issues. Conversely, working within palliative and end-of-life care can afford opportunities for professional growth and for interns whose field placements are structured around an awareness of the fragility of human existence. It is the presenters' hope to offer a model for field placements in palliative and end-of-life care. Participants will be introduced to ways in which they can embrace and cultivate their students' "death anxiety" in order to help them develop sensitivity and empathy to their clients' needs.

## CLASS OUTLINE

- I. Experiential Exercise
  - a. Icebreaker – write personal obituary
  - b. Quick discussion
    - i. Sharing personal beliefs surrounding death and dying
    - ii. Sharing professional experiences with death
  
- II. *When Death Knocks at the Door*
  - a. Impact of death awareness/anxiety on clinical practice
  - b. Impact of death awareness/anxiety on student
  - c. When the student becomes the patient
    - i. Our story
  
- III. Creating a Clinically-Sound Yet Humanistic Internship Program
  - a. Initial interview:
    - i. Starting where the student is, professionally and personally
  - b. Orientation and training period

- c. Year-round training (in-services)
  - d. Individual supervision
  - e. Student process group
- IV. The Use of Parallel Process in Palliative Care and End-of-Life Work
- a. Field Instructor as role model for student
  - b. Student as role model for Field Instructor
- V. Addressing Transference and Countertransference
- a. Death anxiety
    - i. Experiential exercise (Death Depression Scale OR MFODS)
  - b. Despair
  - c. Loss of control and hopelessness
- VI. *Is It Cancer?* Promoting Self-Care
- a. Addressing self-care in student internship programs
  - b. Attending to our own emotions

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

1. Gain a deeper appreciation and recognition of the impact of the awareness of death on a social work internship within the palliative and end-of-life field.
2. Learn how to create an internship program that utilizes humanistic and existential principles, maintaining clinical acuity while honoring the human/personal dimension.
3. Understand how to use the parallel process effectively to role model for students who are working with individuals who are terminally ill and (actively) dying.
4. Determine how to address existential issues and counter-transference that may arise for interns.
5. Learn how to address self-care and create a safe space where students can process their feelings and reactions around the work.