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INTERCULTURAL CARE IN THE SOCIAL AND HEALTHCARE SECTOR (I-CARE)

MODULE 4 AGEING, DYING & DEATH

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■ KEY TO SYMBOLS

	ACTIVITY		TRAINER'S NOTES		SUMMARY
	TRAINER INPUT		ACTION PLAN		

Introduction

This module explores attitudes to ageing, death and dying across cultures.

Module Aims and Objectives

The purpose of this module is for learners to:

- Have discussed the different attitudes to ageing across cultures.
- Have explored different beliefs about dying.
- Have identified their own cultural attitudes to ageing, dying and death.
- Understand religious rules and notions about death from a comparative approach.
- Recognise the importance of the "rites of passage" when dealing with death.
- Learn about the major religions' perception of dying and death.
- Have become aware that understanding different cultural attitudes to ageing, dying and death will help them in their work.

Learning Outcomes

After studying this module, you will be able to:

- ◆ Identify the different attitudes to ageing across cultures
- ◆ Discuss with others your own cultural attitudes to ageing, dying and death and how these may be similar or different to others.
- ◆ Ask questions of those you are caring for, to better understand what is important to them about how aspects of ageing, dying and death should be dealt with.

Understanding, Skills and Competences developed:

- ◆ Increased Intercultural awareness.
- ◆ Enhancement of life skills
- ◆ Better developed social skills when working across cultures
- ◆ Personal skills in working across cultures.
- ◆ Increased level of competence in working in multi-cultural environments.

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Training method applied/ What you have to do

This module is available as e-learning and also can be delivered face-to-face in a classroom, or with a class via a virtual platform.

It involves

- ◆ Reading background information on the subject of the module.
- ◆ Completion of exercises and activities either by e-learning or attending a face-face course, or via a virtual platform.
- ◆ Self-assessments for reflection and checking understanding

Duration: 2 hours

Further Reading

You will also find a range of supporting resource materials for further information, available in the [I-CARE Toolbox](#) and on the [I-CARE App](#).



Section 1: Attitudes to Ageing Across Cultures



Trainer input (slide 3)

Introduction

'I was talking to my colleague yesterday about how we will all get old and eventually die. The conversation began because he was caring for someone, he said was quite old. I asked him how old the person was, and he said he couldn't remember the exact age, but quite old. I wondered how old he thought was quite old, it seems to me we all have a different idea about this, and we have different attitudes to old people and death'. What do you think?



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- a. More important than a young person OR
- b. Less important than a young person
- c. Wise and someone to ask about important things OR
- d. Someone who is out of touch with life and whose opinions and ideas are less important.

Do you think your answers to these questions are influenced by your own cultural background?



Trainer's Notes (slide 6)

Sum up the discussions and continue the theme. The culture that we are born into, grow up in, and live in, influences our attitudes to many things including how and what we think about ageing, how we expect to be treated in old age, and our attitudes towards the elderly. Continue with the next activity to explore learner's attitudes to ageing and widening it to different cultural expectations. After the activity has been completed by the individual learners then lead a class discussion about the ideas and beliefs that came up.



- a. Old people are seen as wise.
- b. It is believed that we should listen to old people.
- c. Old people do not know much about today's world.
- d. It is difficult having an interesting conversation with most old people.
- e. Old people have different opinions to young people.
- f. It is younger people who are thought of as important and old people should listen to them.



Trainer's Summary (slide 8)

In some other cultures older people are not respected in the same way - beliefs and attitudes towards them may be less positive, even if people are outwardly polite and respectful to them.

Section 2: Approaches to Dying



Trainer input (slides 10, 11)

Introduction

Cultures differ in their beliefs about the dying process and what happens when death occurs. Some religious and cultural traditions, such as Hinduism, envision a cyclical pattern of life and death where a person is thought to die and be reborn with a new identity which can occur multiple times. Christians believe that death only occurs once, that people shed their bodily form which continues in spirit, and believers will then be welcomed into heaven. Amongst some cultures it is believed that the living and the dead co-exist and the dead can influence the wellbeing of the living. Other cultures believe ancestors are to be revered and must be looked after to ensure they have all they need in the afterlife. There are also different notions of death and the afterlife. The afterlife can be perceived as everything from a meaningless and desolate place (such as Hades, the realm of the dead in ancient Greek culture); a happy place (such as in Islam and Christianity's conception of Paradise). For some religions, death is an immediate transition to a new life but for others it leads into entirely new forms of existence (such as Hinduism).



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Activity – A Good Death (slide 12)

No one wants to die but when we do, we would all like a good death

What would you consider a 'good death' for either yourself or a member of your family?

Do you think that your views mirror those of your family and peers, and work colleagues?

Why do you think they do/do not?



Trainer input (slides 13.14.15)

Death Affirming and Death Denying or Defying Cultures

Some cultures seem to manage death well. That is death is not feared to a high level. These cultures can be referred to as '**death affirming**' societies. In some cultures, the aversion to dying is so strong that they could be called '**death denying or defying cultures**'.

In death affirming cultures death is accepted as inevitable. It is conceived as a mere transition from one state to another. It is believed that the most effective way to defeat death is to accept it. In death denying or defying cultures people often use words to describe dying like 'passing away' to avoid the word 'death'. They use phrases such as 'fighting an illness' and they equate the death of the body with the death of self.



Trainer's notes (slide 16)

Ask your learners to consider the statements below either alone or in small groups, and to decide which ones apply to them. Then take feedback from your learners on the ones that are most commonly agreed with and continue by asking for the statements that were not identified with and discuss these as a way of exploring different ideas and beliefs about death. Continue then to discuss how these beliefs will differ amongst the people they are caring for.

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Exercise: Your Cultural Attitudes (slide 16)

Tick the statements that you think most apply to how you think about death.

- b. I accept death as a fate that will come to everyone.
- c. I have a belief in an afterlife that makes death less scary.
- d. I see death as a transition from one state to another one.
- e. I don't have a belief in an afterlife, so I believe death is final.
- f. Death is a private event just involving very close family.
- g. I see death as something that involves the wider group of family and friends and community.
- h. When someone dies, I am most likely to say that they have 'passed away' or 'passed on'.



Summary (slide 17)



Section 3: Rites of Passage



Trainer input (slides 19.20.21.22)



Trainer's notes (slide 23)

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Activity – Rites of Passage (slide 24)

- First....
- Then....
- Then...
- Afterwards....



Summary (slide 25)

Section 4 Major Religious Beliefs – Perceptions of Death and Dying



Trainer input (slides 26.27.28.29.30)

In **Buddhism**, life is considered suffering. Death is therefore a deliverance from suffering. This liberation is usually only temporary, as we are usually reborn into a new life. The new life will be exactly as good or bad as our actions in this life have been. Until we are born again, we dwell in one of the many heavens or hells that exist. The ultimate goal is to become free from this cycle of rebirth, to attain Nirvana (often described as nothing). It is achieved by realizing that everything is suffering and thereby reaching beyond that, not holding on to life.

Linear Perceptions

In **Judaism**, it is believed that all who died at the end of time must be resurrected to be accountable to God. Here it is decided who is to be condemned to eternal damnation and who is to live in the kingdom of God. The basic idea is that soul and body cannot be separated, and that God has the power to create and recreate everything. The deceased is buried as soon as possible after the death. S/he is washed and wrapped in a white cloth, by a special funeral company that is part of the congregation. The body is placed in a wooden coffin and if it is a funeral outside Israel, a little soil from the Holy Land is usually placed under the head. Flower decorations are not usually used. The following week the bereaved and the sons say kaddish (an Aramaic prayer praising God) and they mourn for their parents every day for a year and then on the day of death, where candles are also lit.

Christianity. In the Old Church, Christians and Jews shared the same belief in the afterlife that on Judgment Day we should all be resurrected with our bodies. Today, many Christians believe that the deceased ascends to heaven after death to live in paradise. So many people believe that it is not necessary to wait for Judgment Day to be saved. Christians are buried so that the dead look to the east. This is connected with the idea that Christ, on his return on

the Day of Judgment, comes with the rising sun to call the dead up from the graves. Today both burial and cremation are used, but up to 1850 it was thought that cremation was incompatible with the Christian faith.

Islam. Everything, including death, comes from Allah. A Muslim must therefore be ready to face death when s/he is supposed to. The most important thing is that a person has lived their life in a good and responsible way, that they have been a good and obedient Muslim to Allah. When a Muslim dies, the spirit of life (soul) leaves the body. This is followed by a stay in the tomb where the deceased is interrogated by two angels and receives the final verdict.

What happens from the individual's death to the Day of Judgment is controversial and diverse, but on Judgment Day everyone, both living and dead, must be judged on their deeds. Burials in Islam usually follow the instructions given by the Prophet Muhammad.

The body is buried as soon as possible, preferably on the same day. After a ritual wash, the body is clothed in a white cloth and carried to the mosque or burial ground. The deceased is placed with his head facing Mecca. During the entire session, from the home to the cemetery, recitations are given from the Koran.



Divide your group into pairs and ask them to discuss. Whether they follow a religion or not they will most likely belong to a culture that sees death as cyclical or linear - which would they most align to and why? Then lead a general discussion.



Whether you follow a religion or not, discuss if you think that the culture you belong to follows a cyclical or linear belief and why you think this.



We all must eventually die. What we believe in and where we go after death will depend on whether we follow a religion or no religion and which religion we follow.

However even if we have no religion, it will still be important to us to go through some sort of rite of passage at the end of our life or for others to whom we are close.

The people for whom we provide care will have their own individual needs and also be part of the wider needs of the culture that they belong to.

We need to ensure that these needs can be discussed and met to allow for the smooth transition of the body leaving the earth to go where the individual believes it to go.



Section 5 Working Across Cultures



Introduction

Our attitudes to older people can differ from others with a different cultural background to ourselves. This can affect how we view them, how we listen to them, how we acknowledge what they are saying and what we provide for them. It can also affect the extent to which we involve their family members in their care throughout their life and during end-of-life care.



Exploring the main things to think about to provide a culturally appropriate service to an older person.

Which statements do you agree with and why?

- a. You should automatically give older people respect because of their age.
- b. You should always include the family and also ask them what they think is the best for their relative.
- c. You must ask the older person directly what they actually want.

- d. You should provide what you think they want and what is right for them.
- e. You go directly to the family, not to the older person, and ask them their wishes.
- f. You think it doesn't matter what age someone is, you will treat them in the same way as everyone else.



When dealing with or providing care to an older person it is important to take their cultural background into consideration. This means you must take the time to ask questions and listen to the answers that they are giving you. You must suspend your judgment and not think that what they are telling you is not the best way to proceed, influenced by your own cultural norms. Different cultures view aging, death and dying in different ways and deal with both the emotions of ageing, the expectation of dying or being bereaved in different ways. Living in a society represented by many cultures and religious beliefs means that attitudes to ageing, dying and death can be different from your own.



What have I learnt about myself and my own cultural background?

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What have I learnt about ageing, dying and death?

What else would I like to know?

What changes will I make in my current practise to ensure that all cultural considerations are in place for the people for whom I care?