



SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION IN THANATOLOGY CANCER MENTION INTERVENCIÓN DEL TRABAJO SOCIAL EN TANATOLOGÍA MENCIÓN CANCER

Andrade-Constante Alison Nicole¹

Núñez-Paredes Evelyn Marlene²

Pino-Loza Eulalia³

¹ Universidad Técnica de Ambato. Ambato, Ecuador. ali.andrade9015@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0034-2399>

² Universidad Técnica de Ambato. Ambato, Ecuador. enunez5782@uta.edu.ec <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9168-0547>

³ Universidad Técnica de Ambato. Ambato, Ecuador. enunez5782@uta.edu.ec <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4630-7409>

ABSTRACT:

This study was carried out with the purpose of investigating the role of the social worker in the field of thanatology in Ecuador and the possibility of looking for spaces from social work for professional intervention directed to the patient diagnosed with cancer, the family and/or person who accompanies in the disease process. It is the beginning of an investigation of the intervention of social work in thanatology mention cancer in Ecuador, the research was developed with the aid of 15 respondents, staff of the cancer hospital Solca Núcleo Tungurahua and volunteer patients.

Keywords: Intervention, Thanatology, Social Work, Disease, Patient diagnosed with cancer.

RESUMEN:

El presente estudio se realizó con el propósito de investigar el papel del trabajador social en el campo de la tanatología en Ecuador y la posibilidad de buscar espacios desde el trabajo social para la intervención profesional direccionada al paciente diagnosticado con cáncer, la familia y/o persona que acompaña en el proceso de enfermedad. Es el inicio de una investigación de la intervención del trabajo social en tanatología mención cáncer en el Ecuador, la investigación se desarrolló con la participación de 15 encuestados, personal del hospital oncológico Solca Núcleo Tungurahua y pacientes voluntarios.

Palabras clave: Intervención, Tanatología, Trabajo Social, enfermedad, paciente diagnosticado con cáncer.



1. INTRODUCTION

The interest in this subject arose during lessons of Social Work and Mental Health of the career of Social Work at Universidad Técnica de Ambato and when performing pre-professional practices at the Solca Núcleo Tungurahua oncology unit in which new concerns emerged about the role of the social worker in a patient diagnosed with cancer.

"Cancer is the second cause of death in the world; in 2015, it caused 8.8 million deaths. Nearly one in six deaths in the world are due to this disease". (Organización Mundial de La Salud (OMS), 2018)

The Solca Oncological Hospital, with a core in the city of Quito and Guayaquil, leads an intervention linked to the area of thanatology called palliative care. However, it seeks to highlight the role of social workers in the face of loss processes of people, in this case, the loss of health, in the country the thanatological field has been very little addressed, nor has it been collected in the stages that make up a loss and grief from the point of view of thanatology and intervention of Social Work.

The human being needs to relate and maintain personal ties for its full development, these ties come to be broken in the face of a loss, it is when the emotions about grief or losses arise. The way of coping varies according to the ability to get back to life, assimilating and managing emotions, denial, anger, negotiation, depression and acceptance, a fundamental part of the professional intervention that guides the patient to know the right moment to regularise emotions, in this way avoids a negative impact to the people around the patient and also prevents them from developing illnesses regarding their mental health, or that the diagnosed illness worse, despite people prepare in advance of the event, people cannot stay calm, our brain when being in this situation is blocked and in most cases, it is usual to go into a state of shock.

Currently, it is intended to promote social work in thanatology to provide an adequate and comprehensive intervention in the psychosocial field in patients with cancer.



Background

In past times, thanatology was centralized in patients with complex diseases to treat, which had to assimilate the possibility of facing death. Currently, its meaning is broader, thanatology helps to process and give meaning to irreversible events such as death, but it is also linked to significant losses such as loss of health, this loss, in turn, produces changes in the life of the person, changes to which the person is not prepared. All these events lead us to a grieving process.

Duels are a process, a normal, dynamic, and active process but not a state; it is an intimate and private process but at the same time a public process (rituals, mourning). Grief is a process that tends to reorganization and elaboration, with individual dimensions, familiar and social. (Valentin, 2005, p. 5)

One of the pioneer countries in forging a thanatological field is Mexico, the Mexican Association of Thanatology AMTAC, (s/f) that its main objective is to cure the pain related to death and hope, whether of the ill, their close relatives, etc. So that they do not have suicidal behaviors aided by timely intervention.

Thanatology is considered as the scientific knowledge of death, its rites and meaning, considering the human being as an integral person from the bio-psycho-social and spiritual points of view, therefore, it is multidisciplinary and cares for people close to death, patients diagnosed with cancer as well as those around them, the patient, their family, and the health team.

Thanatology focuses on any significant loss that the human being has, that is why the importance of Thanatology today it is indisputable, considering that throughout our lives is common to face various types of losses, deaths, separations, loss of limbs, loss of health, illusions before a disability, which is why its field of action is highly broad. (Mariño, 2006, p. 10)

Thanatology studies everything treated with losses not only with death losses of all sorts, acquisitive losses, losses of freedom, loss of health, losses, or estrangement at the family level. In the specific case of cancer, throughout the whole process of the disease, a series of losses occur. The lifetime of a person with cancer is altered after its diagnosis by clinical studies analysis, aggressive and lengthy treatments that may include surgery, radiation therapy,



chemotherapy, etc. and the side effects of the same treatments. In this manner, radically altering his life and that of his family as it used to be, added to the fact that many times the person did not feel so sick as he feels from the moment they start to treat him, starting from the diagnosis the patient goes through a process of change which, as a result of his loss of health assumes his illness, but is not considered the family, social and emotional situation of the person, in the process is fundamental to have specialised psychosocial support not only directed to the patient but also to the family.

The objective of social work in this area is to identify and intervene in the social factors that affect the health conditions of the eligible population through a methodological process aimed at promoting that the user population participate in the development of promotional actions, protection, conservation, and recovery of health based on their needs.

Thanatological Accompaniment

Accompaniment in the thanatological aspect requires a set of skills such as communication skills, empathy, active listening knowing how to accompany. For

the author Álvarez, (2011) implies recognizing and understanding the reality of the other and get involved in it, rather than requiring the other person to get involved in our approach of seeing things.

Social Work and Thanatology

The significant importance of thanatology as a service in hospitals has been analyzed, in this way Social Work professionals obtain the power and opportunity to provide emotional, psychosocial support to patients and family members who are going through a process of grief. Although the professional work of the Social Worker focuses on seeking well-being in the different areas of the life of social actors, promotes development through intervention models, techniques, and instruments without discrimination of no nature always looking for the best conditions in the face of deficiencies, problems, and human needs.

Social work is a professional activity that takes place with intervention in demanding situations. This action is necessary, on the part of the social worker, the knowledge and understanding of complex reality with multiple references that is characterized by a continuous change. (Robertis, 2003, p. 73)



Thanatology in oncology hospitals is of great importance as both Social Workers and other professionals can provide emotional support to patients and family members who are going through loss of health. The Social Worker promotes the common good through the sense of justice towards any individual or group, with equitable and professional treatment, thus seeking improvements in the population and generating skills to promote the self-sufficiency in people. It is necessary to allude to professional secrecy to face problems, needs and deficiencies of the user, so it is required to save stealthily all kinds of information, fulfilling professional duties, regulations, and functions with honesty in all acts within the professional field.

Social Work intervention strategies

Application of the specific methodology, whether it is in care of individual or groups and communities. Thus, offering strategies and alternatives for a viable solution.

- It is necessary to have an objective observation of the humans' phenomena, thus using the technique of observation and recording facts and phenomena of social reality.

- For the collection of information, it is essential to design and apply the typical techniques and instruments of Social Work.
- It is necessary to handle statistics as a tool that facilitates the analysis of information.
- For the improvement of living conditions, is necessary the organisation of the population.
- Guide the population towards solving problems.
- Address group and individual problems.
- To identify social problems, it is necessary to develop a diagnosis and use the human and material resources that facilitate the solution of the same.

The specific functions performed by the social worker consist in:

Preventive: immediate action on the causes that generate problems, whether individual or collective, derived from social and human relations. Prepares and executes intervention projects to populations at social risk and lacking in the application of human rights.



Direct attention: the objective of this function is to promote the development of people's skills and abilities to deal with problems on their own or future difficulties and successfully integrate into society. Responds to the care for individuals or groups who are at risk of developing problems of social nature.

Planning: it is the action of guiding and leading to an action plan following the objectives set, established in a specific program with advance through a reality analysis process.

Mediation: The Social Worker acts as a catalyst to make possible, with their intervention, the resolution of the conflict.

Supervision: Execute control over the tasks performed by professionals in different areas for the full practice of their functions.

Evaluation: The techniques, means and times used are considered to contrast the results obtained in different actions concerning the proposed objectives to indicate errors and dysfunctions in what has been done to allow rethinking the objectives and new ways of achieving it.

- Know, manage, and promote existing resources among users and

professionals from other fields of science.

- Receive, guide, and educate individuals, families, groups, and communities in the peaceful resolution of conflicts through dialogue.
- Participates in the design, creation, and administration of programs about occupational health, occupational welfare, and social security.

The process of accompanying thanatological social work in oncological units, "is carried out through therapeutic workshops, home visits, both individual and family psychotherapy if necessary, camps, playful and recreational accompaniment and other activities with a therapeutic foundation" (García, 2019, p. 7)

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology used in the research is mixed, that is, qualitative and quantitative due to the way the information is collected, it is also bibliographic because it is a systematic and sequential process of collection, selection and analysis of bibliographic content, descriptive research was applied to know specifically the possibility of looking for spaces for the social



worker and the challenge of the professional facing the thanatological field in oncological units.

Subjects of study

It was possible to survey 15 people immersed in the Oncological field of the Hospital Solca Núcleo Tungurahua and patients who decided voluntarily to collaborate with the investigative process.

The sample was non-probabilistic because the selection of the subjects was based on own judgments of the research on social work and thanatology mention cancer.

Techniques and Instruments

The process was carried out through online surveys, the survey was structured by the researchers which consist of 7 questions with the objective to inquire about the thanatological field in social work and the importance that people give to grieving processes, prepare people for losses and accompany in the family-patient process since the patient is diagnosed.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the results collected in the surveys carried out at the Solca Núcleo

Tungurahua Hospital, Oncology area and patients who voluntarily decided to collaborate in this research, the following results were obtained:

- 63.6% of people surveyed know the term of thanatology, however, they do not associate it with social work, 27.3% of the respondents do not know the term and 9.1% do not clearly understand the term. It is worth mentioning that the term is not precisely related to social work and its intervention, since in ancient times it was exclusively related to the series of circumstances surrounding the death of a human being.
- After defining the term thanatology and its relationship with social work for the respondents, 100% of the respondents consider important the intervention of the social worker since the patient is diagnosed with cancer up to palliative patients, as it is a discipline that studies the phenomenon of death in human beings and focuses on the circle of care or support system of the patient.



Additionally:

- 63.6% of the people surveyed consider that it is important to try to work in the thanatological accompaniment so that the patient accept their reality, emotions, that the patient adapts to the new circumstances, close the circles, seek improvement in their quality of life and if it is the case, prepare them for death, 18.2% of those surveyed consider important to work with the patient to accept their reality 9.1% consider it necessary to work with emotions and 9.1% close the circles. Considering the objectives of thanatology that focus on the quality of life of the patient, helping the family cope with the situation and face the loss of health, carefully developing a grieving process.
- According to the perspective of the survey participants, 63.6% consider that the intervention of social work in thanatology satisfies the psychosocial need of the patient, 18.2% of the respondents consider the social environment, 45.5% consider the family environment and 27.3% the psychological part. Thanatology is part of a socio-emotional and psychosocial

conception that provides the patient with an additional treatment to medicine that seeks a deep conception of all human nature supported in a multidisciplinary way.

- From the surveyed staff, 45.5% considers that in the intervention of social work and thanatology should encompass comprehensive holistic care, 27.3% of the people surveyed consider the care efficiently and effectively, 27.3% consider that the intervention of social work and thanatology encompass quality care.

Regarding the intervention of social work and thanatology within the oncological field, it encompasses several spheres of intervention from this perspective about holistic care providing a professional service from social work considering the person in an integral manner combining treatment, medicine, diet and psychosocial factors with effective and efficient care and with quality care around the patient with palliative diagnosis and people who go through a loss of health with a cancer diagnosis.

- 100% of the surveyed participants consider necessary the intervention of social work in thanatology for diagnosed



patients with cancer and/or palliative diagnosis.

The role played by the professional in social work with a thanatological approach is a determining factor in the quality of the service offered to the cancer patient, the intervention of the Social Work of Thanatology in oncological hospitals is limitedly addressed in Ecuador, hence the need to survey the population immersed in this ambit in which the surveyed group considers necessary.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Thanatology and the role of social work is of vital importance when providing support to the patient with a cancer diagnosis, the palliative patient, and his family, preparing them in that stage of their life helping in this process by supporting with strategies and relevant techniques of the profession with the intention of prioritising a process of adaptation to the changes that occurred because of the patient's diagnosis.

The results of the applied surveys demonstrate the interest that the personnel selected have for this process of the oncological unit Solca and patients on the

comprehensive holistic intervention of the worker in thanatology since the patient is diagnosed with cancer.

In the international literature there is information on the thanatology and social work, however, in Ecuador social work from the thanatological point of view is lowly addressed and much less for the oncological units.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

To the students and professionals of social work are recommended:

Carry out other intervention and research processes that address aspects related to these new realities that people diagnosed with cancer and their families deal, as in the country there is limited research carried out in the field of Thanatology and the intervention of the Social Worker.

To the colleges and careers of Social Work:

Include in the curriculum or study plans, workshops about the role that meets the Social Worker in the Palliative Care Unit. It is recommended carry out training on topics that cover the new realities to reinforce professional work and keep up to date.



To palliative and/or oncological care units:

It is recommended to open future professional and pre-professional practices that allow knowing more about this action field due to in the country the intervention of the Social Worker in Thanatology is a novel or unknown field.

<https://www.who.int/es/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cancer>

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