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**EXISTENTIAL CONCERNS ABOUT DEATH —  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF DYING PATIENTS  
IN A DANISH HOSPICE**

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**Background** Research suggests that addressing dying patients' existential concerns can help improve their quality of life. Common existential conditions, such as a search for meaning and considerations about faith, are probably intensified in a palliative setting and existential concerns about death are likewise intensified when patients face their impending death. Knowledge of modern, secular existential concerns about death is under-researched, and therefore, it is difficult to develop and implement specifically targeted support to dying patients.

**Aim** The aim of this paper is to present the results from a qualitative field study illuminating the variety of dying patients' existential concerns about their impending death.

**Method** Data was generated through ethnographic fieldwork comprising 17 semi-structured interviews with dying patients and 38 days of participant observation at three Danish hospices.

**Results** The analyses of interview data revealed two categories of existential concerns. The first category "Thoughts and feelings about death" demonstrated how the patients: 1) realized the forthcoming death; 2) felt sorrow about leaving life; 3) were not anxious about death as a final state. The second category "Managing death" demonstrated how the patients: 1) avoided thinking about death; 2) reconstructed individual ideas about afterlife on the basis of faith and previous cultural meaning-making; 3) were planning practical aspects about death; 4) wished to focus on living. The patients' existential concerns of death in a modern, secular setting is not adequately described by neither Irvin Yalom's existential psychology nor Kübler-Ross' theory about death stages. The complex concerns might be explained in the light of research in everyday life based on Martin Heidegger's phenomenological thinking.

**Conclusion** The analyses indicated that the patients' concerns were complex, contradictory and not suited to be understood within a single theory. An ongoing reflection including different theoretical perspectives seems important when providing existential care and support to dying patients.