Surprised by Joy

What do lay people find hard about talking the death taboo

The Omega Course: Tackling the death taboo

The Omega Course (Ω) aims to empower its participants to discuss death and dying through health education and role-play. This study assessed its effectiveness.

Methods An anonymised, mixed methods questionnaire was distributed to 62 Ω participants. The 24 responses (38.7%) were analysed using thematic analysis and inferential statistics.

Results Thematic analysis identified two main barriers to discussing death and dying: fear of upsetting others; and difficulty broaching the subject. Ω helped to alleviate participants’ fears: ‘helped me […] stand alongside friends and relatives going through traumatic times’; and improved their confidence in initiating discussion ‘It gave me the words to say to people when I needed to say something’.

Before and after scores assessing three areas (how comfortable participants felt discussing death and dying; how often they discussed death and dying; how afraid they felt about death), were analysed using paired t-tests. There was significant improvement across all areas (p<0.01).

Conclusion Ω is successful in enabling participants to discuss death and dying, an important step towards taboo reduction with positive implications for end of life planning.