

**EXPLORING THE ROLE OF THE HOSPICE VOLUNTEER:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

by

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**IN LOVING MEMORY OF MY MOTHER, ELSIE MARGARET HOLDING
1925-1976**

DECLARATION

I declare that EXPLORING THE ROLE OF THE HOSPICE VOLUNTEER: A QUALITATIVE STUDY is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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ABSTRACT

The hospice volunteer is viewed as an integral member of a multidisciplinary team, with various roles directed at enhancing the quality of life of patients and their families. The purpose of this study is to provide an integrated picture of the hospice volunteer, their role, the human dimensions of this role and the impact this has on their lives as not much has been written in literature about this specific sub-group of hospice workers.

The context of the study is a hospice in Gauteng where the researcher works as a volunteer. The ethnographic case study has been chosen as an appropriate research design as it explores the above phenomenon from the volunteers' point of view. The subjects are three volunteers who have been active at the hospice for at least twelve months. Evidence in terms of specific interviews and observations are used to draw conclusions. The interviews are based on a minimal number of open-ended questions.

The primary method of analysis is the examination of transcripts from these in-depth interviews. A thematic analysis is carried out in which a detailed description of the emerging themes are given. Four major themes are identified and explored: Description of the role; The experience of being a volunteer; A way of coping; and The influence of the hospice culture. Sub-themes that emerge within each case study vary due to the individual nature of the experience of the role. Themes are explored in light of current theory and findings. This was to note the similarities and differences of this specific sub-group of volunteers compared to others found in the literature reviewed for this study. As there is a scarcity of literature pertaining specifically to hospice volunteers, the study depends mostly on writings pertaining to hospice staff and volunteers in general.

A summary and integration of the core findings of the three case studies is given and their similarities and differences are explored. How some of the different themes interlink is also discussed. Although various sub-themes found in the individual case studies are significant to the individual cases, some of them can be incorporated into common themes when looking at the

volunteers as a group. The strengths and limitations of the study are discussed as well as recommendations for the hospice organisation and further research.

KEY TERMS:

Hospice volunteers; Hospice organisation; Hospice training; Volunteer role; Volunteer experience; Stress; Coping mechanisms; Confronting mortality; Hospice counselling; Counselling the dying; Bereavement Counselling; Ethnography; Case study; Qualitative approach.