
Abstract

Neutrality and mourning work in psychotherapy for a patient with advanced cancer

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Clients with advanced cancer are often faced with the reality of their prognosis. This paper reports on an 11-month psychotherapy process with a male client who received treatment for advanced cancer at a general hospital. The client had considered discontinuing treatment because of the reality that a cure was difficult and his cancer would eventually lead to death. However, with support from his healthcare providers and psychotherapy, the client survived a treatment period of approximately 1 year. The neutrality of psychotherapy was considered important in respecting the client's conflicts and supporting his independent decision-making. This neutrality also functioned "in between" the client and the medical team. Psychotherapy supported the client and his wife in their mourning work as they faced death and grieved together and supported their psychological well-being. The client described his end-of-life suffering, and the understanding and support of multiple professionals supported both the client and his wife. The psychologist was considered to have a role in undertaking the projection of "death" through the conclusion of psychotherapy.

Keywords: advanced cancer, mourning work, neutrality, death
