



Economic
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Identity work in palliative care: A Conversation Analytic study of interactions with newly diagnosed patients

ESRC DTP Collaborative Studentship

Loughborough University and Treetops Hospice

The Midlands Graduate School is an accredited Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP). One of 15 such partnerships in the UK, the Midlands Graduate School, is a collaboration between the Universities of Warwick, Birmingham, Nottingham, Aston, Leicester, Loughborough, De Montfort and Nottingham Trent.

Loughborough University as part of Midlands Graduate School is now inviting applications for an ESRC Doctoral Studentship in association with our collaborative partner Treetops Hospice to commence in October 2025.

The candidate will be based in the [Department of Communication and Media at Loughborough University](#) (UK) and will be supervised by Dr Marco Pino and Prof Elizabeth Peel. The project involves conversation analytic research in collaboration with Treetops Hospice (Derby, UK) where the candidate will be supervised by Sharan Harris-Christensen, manager of the [Treetops Hospice Education & Development Team](#).

Treetops Hospice is an independent third-sector organisation delivering palliative care services to the local community. The candidate will work with Harris-Christensen and the staff of the [Treetops Hospice Wellbeing Café](#). The candidate will video-record drop-in information sessions run by registered nurses, occupational therapists, support and information practitioners, and volunteers for newly diagnosed patients and their families. The aim will be to investigate, using conversation analysis methods, interactional practices that the staff use to help patients maintain a positive identity as competent and autonomous individuals after a diagnosis of life-limiting illness. The significance of the project is readily available when considering how a diagnosis of incurable progressive illness, alongside a reduction in functional capacities for daily living, can negatively affect a patient's identity. We are interested in the ways interactions with healthcare practitioners can support patients in retaining a positive identity, dignity, and "normality in an otherwise changed reality" (Bye, 1998, p. 12).

The project will leverage the distinctive approach of conversation analysis by investigating identity as a practical achievement of participants' actions in interaction. With support from the supervisory team, the candidate will use conversation analysis methods to examine interactions video-recorded at the Wellbeing Café to identify challenges that patients face in maintaining a positive identity in interaction; identify interactional practices that the staff use to support patients in negotiating a positive identity; and draw implications for social scientific

understandings of identity construction after a diagnosis of incurable illness. The project will include qualitative interviews with patients and staff.

The supervisory team have extensive experience of using conversation analysis in video-based studies of interactions in healthcare and social-care settings, including palliative and end-of-life care (please refer to our staff pages for our publications: [Pino](#) and [Peel](#)). The project will give the candidate solid grounding in social interaction research. They will participate in a thriving research community within the Discourse & Rhetoric Group ([DARG](#)), a world-leading research group in language and social interaction. At Treetops Hospice, the candidate will develop transferable skills relevant to the translation of research findings into training and policy recommendations for the healthcare sector. Harris-Christensen is an experienced communication trainer with nursing background, who will co-supervise the candidate and expose them to Treetops Hospice's extensive work in the design and delivery of communication skills training for practitioners.

We especially welcome applications from candidates with familiarity and experience with using conversation analysis, although this is not necessary to apply for the studentship. Please send informal enquiries to Marco Pino: m.pino@lboro.ac.uk

Application Process

To be considered for this PhD, please complete the Collaborative Studentship application form [available online here](#). Please also upload an anonymised CV as part of the online application process. Shortlisted applicants will also be required to provide transcripts and two references.

Application deadline: 28th February

Note: shortlisted applicants will be interviewed on the 10th of March. The interview will be online on Microsoft Teams. It will be scheduled between 9.00 and 16.00 (GMT).

Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP

Our ESRC studentships cover fees at the home rate, a maintenance stipend, and extensive support for research training, as well as research activity support grants. Support is available to both home and international applicants. For further details, visit: www.mgsdtp.ac.uk/studentships/eligibility/.

Informal enquiries about the research or the Department of Communication and Media prior to application can be directed to Marco Pino. Email: m.pino@lboro.ac.uk.