

# Complex deaths: Understanding complex palliative needs in practices and experiences of dying in community settings

Warwick Industrial Fellowship

**University of Warwick with Marie Curie**

This 3.5 year PhD studentship provides a unique opportunity for a promising STS, social or health science researcher to undertake research aimed at influencing the future of palliative care services.

The aim of the studentship is to provide an understanding of complex needs within practices and experiences of community palliative care and use this to inform and improve understandings of dying.

The PhD is supported and part-funded by Marie Curie.

**PLEASE NOTE: This opportunity is only available to UK students**

## The project

**This studentship will explore how understanding contexts, people or needs as 'complex' is creating inequities in practices and experiences of a good death in palliative care.** This is important because we know that healthcare initiatives that are designed to evaluate patients and manage access to healthcare - such as Liverpool Care Pathway, cancer early diagnosis initiatives, or even the process of gaining a GP appointment - are socially and culturally mediated. Similarly, getting access to specialist palliative care draws on biological and social assumptions about the physiological, personal, social and spiritual; how these are understood to relate to each other; and, how they can be best balanced to achieve a good death. But there has been little research into the social implications of approaching the dying person as potentially 'complex' and how this might affect experiences of a good death.

To address this the student will be able to draw on the support of their supervisors who have explored novel health metrics (e.g. Lury 2020; Lury et al 2018), complex needs and the sociology of transitions to palliative care (e.g. Finucane, Swenson, MacArtney et al., 2020; MacArtney et al., 2015). There will be opportunities to undertake observations of palliative care practice and conduct interviews with patients, carers and healthcare professionals. The student will be encouraged to develop theoretically informed understanding of the relationship between wider ideas of society and healthcare as complex. This will help us to better understand how ideas of complexity are contributing to the emergence of novel forms of dying and inequitable experiences of a good death in palliative care.

**The studentship also offers a unique opportunity to collaboration with Marie Curie – the leading charitable funder of research into end of life and palliative care and provider of services supporting people at the end of life. The student will be able to draw on their expertise, networks and connections to both support the student's research project and maximise the impact of findings and recommendations.** The student will undertake placements at the West Midlands hospice (Solihull) and with Marie Curie's national Research and Policy Team (London). Working with the hospice will provide the student with practical experience of working in a research active multidisciplinary clinical environment. The opportunity to work with Marie Curie's national Research and Policy teams will provide important learning and knowledge exchange opportunities that the student will be able to draw upon as they develop their policy recommendations. This will ensure

the doctoral research generates significant impact across all of Marie Curie's hospices, the hospice community more widely, and the NHS.

### Supervisors

Dr John MacArtney (first supervisor) is an internationally renowned sociologist of dying and palliative care who draws on social and political theory to develop critical conceptual interventions in healthcare and provide recommendations for policy and practice. Part of his Fellowship involves a secondment with Marie Curie, supporting their research work both at the West Midlands Hospice and nationally. He is Unit of Academic Primary Care lead for 'Life-limiting conditions and dying in the community' and he is the co-founder of the new NIHR funded research hub that is bringing together researchers, clinicians, and the public from across the University and the West Midlands to drive forward improvements in palliative care in the region (BRHUmB).

Professor Celia Lury (second supervisor) is Director of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies. Her expertise is in interdisciplinary methods and complex problem spaces. Her current a Wellcome-funded medical humanities project, *People Like You: Contemporary Figures of Personalisation* explores ideas of personalisation in healthcare to consider the implications of these new techniques for stratifying 'persons' precisely in shaping health outcomes and healthcare priorities.

### Person specification

Applicants should have a Masters degree (merit or distinction) in a relevant health or social sciences area or in research methods. Experience and/or understanding of both quantitative and qualitative methodology in a healthcare setting is desirable. Previous research experience, particularly in settings with potentially vulnerable populations, would be an advantage.

### Research environment

You will join the '[Life-limiting conditions and dying in the community](#)' team in the Unit of Academic Primary Care, Warwick Medical School, led by Dr John MacArtney. The team explores experiences of living and caring for people with life-limiting conditions in the community and seeks to provide critical social and health science contributions to the field. The student will also be able to access support and networks in the [Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodology](#).

### **Application Process**

To be considered for this PhD, please submit a CV and covering letter. The covering letter should include a brief statement (up to two pages) describing your interest in this PhD topic and your suitability for this role with regard to your education and experience to date. It should include the names of two referees.

Please submit your application via email to Helen McGowan at [h.mcgowan@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:h.mcgowan@warwick.ac.uk) . Short-listed applicants will be interviewed the week commencing 1 August 2022.

The latest start date for the Studentship is 31 January 2023.

For any enquiries relating to this PhD studentship please contact Dr John MacArtney.  
[john.macartney@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:john.macartney@warwick.ac.uk)

**Application deadline: 25 July 2022**

