

An Interpretive Analysis of Hospice Underutilization by Mexican-Americans in Lansing, Michigan: En Sus Propias Palabras (In Their Own Words)

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at the underutilization of hospice by elderly Mexican-American women in Lansing, Mich. The hospice literature refers to “barriers” as reasons why Mexican-Americans do not use hospice and discusses three different categories: curanderos, familismo, and fatalism. This study analyzes the claims made by the hospice literature and tests its validity by interacting and interviewing Mexican-American elderly women at Lansing’s Cristo Rey Community Center. The results showed that the claims about familismo and fatalism were still important elements which affected the women’s beliefs on death and dying and the use of hospice; however, there was no reported use of curanderos. It was also shown that there is not a “need” for hospice, for an informal hospice already exists. Therefore, in order for hospice to understand the underutilization of its services, it is necessary to speak to the people of minority communities. In this way, they are able to tell, in their own words (en sus propias palabras), of their need for help in dealing with death and dying.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa M. Topoleski holds a Bachelor of Science Degree (Lyman Briggs Biology) and a Master of Arts Degree (Health and Humanities — Bioethics and Medical Anthropology). Michigan State University conferred both degrees. Lisa has worked as a laboratory assistant in diabetes research at Michigan State University and the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine. She is currently pursuing additional professional healthcare training and is exploring healthcare career opportunities.