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# Dignity Conservation Challenges in the End of Life Care in Lithuania

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## Abstract

**Background.** Dignity preservation of terminally ill patients remains one of the most debated yet inconclusive ethical challenges in health care. This paper aimed to address the discrepancies between the caregivers' expectations and normative health professionals' practices related to the protection of patient dignity in end-of-life care in Lithuania during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Methods.** Two qualitative studies were conducted by a multidisciplinary team of researchers on November 2020 and May 2021. The sampling consisted of 33 family caregivers and 26 health professionals (nursing staff) were recruited by using purposeful and snowball sampling techniques. Comparative thematic analysis was conducted to evaluate dignity-related topics from the viewpoints of caregivers, and healthcare professionals. **Results.** Pain management, affirmation of physical well-being, emotional support, and respect for the patient's personality were raised as the most important and mutually agreed aspects in dignity assurance. Lack of institutional support in terms of human and material resources was identified as the obstacles to dignified care. Patient caregivers were also concerned about the needs of more respectful staff communication, better response to the patients' spiritual needs, and not leaving the patients alone in the critical and end-of-life stages. Meanwhile, health professionals, especially the nursing staff, raised questions related to futile medical care (FMC) and dignity protection of the terminally ill patients. **Conclusions.** Respectful, however, medicalized care was identified. We assume it should be updated with to be updated with a holistic approach where the spiritual and emotional needs, as well as general respect, are part of routine healthcare.

**Keywords:** dying, medical sociology, patients' rights, qualitative study, respect for person