



Everyone Dies the Same: A Hospice Comparison



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Location: St Albans, England

St Albans is a city about 20 miles north of London, England. This area was once the Roman city of Verlamion, but is now known as a wealthy, historic town within the London commuter belt.

Placement: Rennie Grove Hospice

My field placement is currently at **Michigan Medicine** in the **Adult Palliative Care Consult Team** where I treat patients with life-limiting and chronic illnesses from the point of diagnosis all the way to hospice/end-of-life. I wanted to be placed at a hospice so that I could start to understand how English citizens view death and what it means to be living with a chronic illness.

Rennie Grove Hospice is unique because it doesn't offer residential hospice, only home and day hospice.

- They provide one or more services to over **2,500 people** each year
- Team of over **1,500 volunteers**
- Run **22 Charity Shops**/"Thrift Stores"
- Rely on over **8.1 million pounds of donations** each year (9.9 million dollars)

Hospice in the U.S.

- **Views of Hospice** – often signifies “giving up,” so many people underutilize it
- **Funding** – insurance, grants, partial funding from donations
- **Services Provided** – residential and home hospice, PT, OT, “respite care”, counselling
- **Day Hospice** – almost non-existent

Hospice in the UK

- **Views of Hospice** – equivalent to dying, which people are generally afraid of
- **Funding** – donations, grants, volunteers, minimal NHS funding
- **Services Provided** – residential and home hospice, day hospice, complementary therapies, PT, OT, “respite care”, bereavement support
- **Day Hospice** – all day outpatient hospice services where patients socialize with other patients, check-in with nurses, and participate in a variety of activities

Outcomes

- **Academic Reflection:** I wrote a paper outlining the major differences in how people in the U.S. and UK view death, fund hospice, and serve terminally ill people.
- **Rennie Grove Newsletter:** I wrote a personal reflection for their organization's newsletter.
- **Blog:** I created a blog to document my experience. I detailed the different areas of my hospice agency that I shadowed and reflected on the differences I was observing from my U.S. experiences.

Skills Utilized/Developed

- Assessment
- Engagement
- Critical Thinking
- Cultural Humility
- Professional Identity
- Research

Classroom Connections

- **SW 630** – During this integrated health course, I read and discussed theories of grief, chronic illness, and the social work role. It's hard to re-create clinical work in the classroom, but it helped provide me with the theoretical framework of what factors to consider when working with these populations.
- **SW 530** – I learned about the U.S. healthcare system through this course and reflected on the impact different insurances can have on people. It helped me have a more thorough reflection on the social justice implications of health insurance during my study.
- **SW 691** – My field placement in Palliative Care has increased my comfort level working with individuals nearing end-of-life. I felt prepared to see and interact with patients at this hospice agency and had a great understanding of the philosophy behind hospice.

Lessons Learned

- It doesn't matter where people are born, what language they speak, or what cultural practices, values or beliefs they hold; **everyone dies the same.**
- All humans are connected by the natural body processes that we all undergo as we are brought into this world and as we leave it.
- It's the practices, beliefs, and rituals in which these events take place that differentiate us.



Pictured here is the "quiet room" at Rennie Grove where patients or employees can go to meditate, relax, take a break, listen to music, etc.

Career Connections

During my trip, I received feedback that I showed a lot of interest in learning from all members of this organization and was really engaged. As I start my career, I plan on continuing to learn from the people I engage with and appreciate new perspectives. I also hope to find a career in palliative care or hospice.

Advice

- Take advantage of this kind of opportunity and apply it to something you're interested in.
- Don't give up — it took me over 6 months to finalize my placement and everything worked out great.
- Be detail-oriented when you're planning. It will take a lot of the stress and uncertainty away if you have a good agenda set for you.

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