



# Providing Dignity Therapy at Hospice Witswatersrand and Soweto Hospice's Adult Day Program

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University of Michigan School of Social Work – Spring/Summer 2015



## Soweto – South Western Townships Johannesburg, South Africa

- Johannesburg is not the capital but is the largest city in South Africa.
- The townships of Soweto developed on the outskirts of Johannesburg as a segregated area to house indigenous African workers for the gold mining industry.
- The world became aware of Soweto on June 16, 1976 when student protests erupted in the Soweto Uprising. The uprising established the ANC in the leading role of the anti-apartheid struggle.
- The city still remains highly segregated.

## Soweto Hospice & Hospice Witswatersrand

Hospice Witswatersrand is a non-profit organization that operates out of two locations in Johannesburg. The Houghton location consists of medical training facilities, administrative offices and a residential hospice all housed in three converted mansions.

The Soweto location used to operate out of shipping containers in Mofolo but is now on a piece of land in Diepkloof that used to be a squatter camp. It has a residential facility that also holds the Adult Day Program and offices.

## Project Information:

I went on home visits in Soweto and sat in on counseling sessions with family members coming to terms with the active dying phase of their loved one.

**Adult Day Program:** The disease burden in the Houghton location is primarily cancer. In the Soweto location, most patients have HIV/AIDS and opportunistic infections, such as multi drug resistant tuberculosis.

For persons with HIV there is an added level of discrimination in finding work. Soweto Hospice offers an Adult Day Program that serves as both a support group and a place for them to create native African handcrafts to sell.

**Dignity Therapy:** Dignity Therapy is a psychosocial intervention developed by Dr. Max Chochinov to help people at end-of-life maintain their dignity in the face of death. It is a life story process where a person is asked to recall meaningful moments in his or her life in an interview with a therapy provider. The interview is transcribed and reorganized into a more cohesive narrative. The document is then reviewed with the patient for accuracy and for edits or additional information. Once incorporated into the document, it is returned to the patient to share with their loved ones or whomever they choose to receive the document.



## Connections:

SW504 – Diversity and Social Justice in Social Work. This class laid the foundation for me to understand aspects of cultural humility and privilege when entering communities.

SW799 – HIV/AIDS: Evidence Based Programs, Policies and Services. This class provided me a context for the spread of HIV/AIDS across the world and how African countries were disproportionately affected by the epidemic.

### Career:

What I learned about how Hospice Wits delivers care in the community inspires me to find new ways of delivering palliative care in the U.S.

## Outcomes:

I was able to provide a book, research articles and a small training on delivering Dignity Therapy to the Social Workers at the Soweto location.

### Patients Interviewed for Dignity Therapy:

1. A patient who was waiting at the hospice for appropriate housing before returning to a shack that was more convenient for his family members to visit and care for him.
2. A patient who recently returned to his family after not hearing from him for several years.
3. Two patients from the Adult Day Program

## Lessons Learned

Hospice Wits operates entirely on fundraising so 85% of their patients cannot pay for their services. They make the concept of dying well a reality for all those they serve.

### Advice

- Write a blog/daily self-reflection – It will help you process and deepen your experience.
- Speak to and get to know the people in your community – their viewpoints will help put your privilege in perspective.
- Do not be afraid to try the food and immerse yourself in the culture. Be brave.

## Skills Utilized/Developed:

- Cultural humility/sensitivity
- Bereavement counseling
- Conducting in-home assessments
- Developing a culture of care
- Fundraising strategies – creating social enterprises to support your organization
- Development of community partnerships

## Acknowledgments:

Many thanks to the Office of Global Activities and the Alumni Board of Governors for their financial support, Ruth Dunkle and Shari Robinson-Lynk for their academic guidance, and to Hospice Wits for hosting me and showing me how they live their mission of providing “no end to caring.”

