

# Evaluating the usefulness of the graphic novel *Vivian*, about gender and palliative care, from the perceptions of Swedish, English and Aotearoa New Zealand student nurses

L. Williams<sup>1</sup>, N. Anderson<sup>1</sup>, A. Deshmukh<sup>2</sup>, A. Gayton<sup>2</sup>, M. Gott<sup>1</sup>, P. Guo<sup>2</sup>, C. Werkander Harstäde<sup>3</sup>, J. Nicol<sup>4</sup>, T. Tavares<sup>5</sup>, S. Waterworth<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Auckland, School of Nursing, Auckland, New Zealand; <sup>2</sup>University of Birmingham, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Birmingham, United Kingdom; <sup>3</sup>Linnaeus University, Department of Health and Caring Sciences, Växjö, Sweden; <sup>4</sup>University of Worcester, School of Nursing and Midwifery Worcester, United Kingdom; <sup>5</sup>AUT University, Communication Design, Auckland, New Zealand



## Background/aims

With ageing populations on the rise improving palliative care through education is a global priority.<sup>1</sup> One means for achieving this is through the use of the creative arts to promote new discussions about the social determinants of end of life care, such as gender, ethnicity, income and education. The graphic novel *Vivian* was created to raise awareness of gender and palliative care.<sup>2</sup> The project aimed to explore undergraduate student nurses' views regarding the usefulness of *Vivian* as a teaching tool about gender and palliative care in undergraduate nursing curricula in Aotearoa New Zealand, England, and Sweden.

## Methods

A total of 10 online focus groups and 3 one-to-one online interviews were held with 2nd and 3rd year nursing students in the three countries. (New Zealand = 3 focus groups, 2 interviews; Linnaeus = 5 focus groups, 1 interview; Birmingham = 2 focus groups). Data were jointly analysed by the cross-national project team using thematic analysis.

## Results

Student nurses voiced their views on how *Vivian* presented issues related to gender and palliative care. Three core themes were identified: 1) reflections on learning about gender and palliative care 2) the importance of good communication with palliative care patients and 3) the usefulness of *Vivian* as a teaching tool.

### 1. Gender and palliative care

One issue related to this theme was students' lack of familiarity with palliative care and how *Vivian* helped bridge the gap regarding a difficult subject.

*I still managed to get quite a lot of information about gender and palliative care whilst viewing [Vivian], which made it easy to, like, place it within a real life scenario. Because I think that's another thing, like, we do struggle sometimes when we're just taught, academically.*

– ENGLISH STUDENT

*I would say I didn't realize there were inequalities in gender and palliative care. I think you would just assume that everyone would get the same kind of care no matter what gender they are!*

– ENGLISH STUDENT

### 2. Importance of good communication

Students regarded communication that led to quality relationships as being at the heart of good palliative care.

*To ask several times, have you understood this? Is there something that you think about? Do you have any questions? I think that often people think they are a burden. They are like, 'Excuse me for coming, excuse me for disturbing you.' I mean, we are here to take care of you, you are not a burden just because you are ill. To make them know that it is okay to feel, think, wonder.*

– SWEDISH STUDENT

Yet gender issues related to healthcare staff's stereotyping could disrupt or shut down communication.

*And then I think, like, examples of her being spoken over as a woman. Like, I think in the GP's office *Vivian* says, 'Oh I'm having a bit of trouble passing water', and the GP kind of, like, quite brashly says, 'What do you mean, like urinating?' So yeah, I think there's a misalignment of *Vivian* trying to be polite and the GP just talking over her.*

– NEW ZEALAND STUDENT

### 3. *Vivian's* usefulness as a teaching tool

The students discussed how *Vivian*, as an example of the 'form' of the graphic novel itself, contributed to their learning and prompted thoughts about their own experiences. For example, the imagery was one aspect that enriched the depth and complexity of their reflections.

*I also really enjoyed the expression of the grumpy doctor because I've literally had an interaction like that with a doctor who had a screen in front of him and just was completely zoned out. And I think that was done really, really, really well.*

– NEW ZEALAND STUDENT

*Yes, the pictures are very descriptive. And that is a disadvantage when you read the books. You don't see the body language, you don't see the expressions. That would have been important to see too.*

– SWEDISH STUDENT

*And there was another bit in the hospital where they said... she had cancer. And then she has to go into palliative care, and she wasn't really sure what it meant... They didn't really, like, look at her, and you know, does she understand?*

– ENGLISH STUDENT

## Conclusions

Arguments for using the arts to represent research include their ability to foster a deep engagement with audiences as well as their potential for significant knowledge transfer. In this sense, *Vivian* speaks to the potential of graphic novels to provide a means for engaging with undergraduate nursing students about topics of importance to the palliative and end of life care curriculum. They offer an alternative to heavily text-driven resources.

## References

- World Health Organization. Quality health services and palliative care: practical approaches and resources to support policy, strategy and practice. [Internet]. 2021 [cited 2023 Apr 20] Available from: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240035164>
- Williams L, Tavares T, Egli V, Moeke-Maxwell T, Gott M. (2021) *Vivian*, the graphic novel: using arts based knowledge translation to explore gender and palliative care, Mortality, doi 10.1080/13576275.2021.1929898 <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/>