Models and theories that can guide grief and bereavement information interventions: an information behaviour lens

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Abstract

Introduction. Information behaviour in grief, bereavement, death, dying and its influence on the development of information interventions is understudied. Although pragmatic and evidence-based practices work well, theoretical and conceptual models, research findings and theories should inform grief and bereavement information interventions developed by specialist counsellors. Extensive literature on death, dying, grief and bereavement counselling/therapy and information behaviour per se, does not address this need. This paper reports on work in progress exploring existing theories and models that might guide research.

Method. Scoping review of literature from applicable disciplines (health, social work, religion, psychology, library/information science) for theories/models reported in grief and bereavement counselling and bereavement information intervention design. The focus is on information behaviour and all related information activities.

Analysis. Two tables based on a content analysis that show theories/models that hold value for information interventions and studies of information behaviour.

Results. The analysis reveals a spectrum of theories including grief theory, grief stage theory, theory of motivated information management. Models for consideration include bereavement model, transtheoretical model (narratives), social interaction model.

Conclusion. Information behaviour research should continue to strive in conceptually and theoretically informing grief and bereavement information interventions, practices and work in grief and bereavement counselling.
Introduction

Grief and bereavement affect all people from all sectors of society and although many try to cope on their own, support and counselling through trained professionals in grief and bereavement counselling can ease the process, and adaptation needed to cope and make sense (Harris and Winokuer, 2019; Steffen et al., 2023). The impact of death and dying is even more prominent during times of pandemics, natural disasters and war (Chachar et al., 2021). Grief (i.e., process following loss e.g., of a person dying) and bereavement (a state of loss e.g., from death) are very complex with numerous factors influencing experiences, great differences in individual levels of coping and with no time limit (Worden, 2018). Sometimes grief escalates to prolonged, complicated or traumatic grief and in extreme cases to psychiatric care (Li et al., 2015); some situations are more unique e.g. dementia grief (Blandin and Pepin, 2017). Grief and bereavement also apply to other situations of loss e.g. divorce, losing a job or house or moving to another country as a refugee. This paper focuses on grief and bereavement related to the death of people.

Earlier information behaviour research addressed temporality (time), spatiality and space influences, multiplicity of complex contexts and the impact of progression in situations (i.e., situations-in-progress). The phenomenology of death, i.e., how it happened, influences information needs and behaviour during grief and bereavement (Fourie, 2020). There are many other influences. This paper will not consider these; the focus is on theories and models that might inform intervention research and that can inform practices of grief and bereavement counselling (Fraser et al., 2009). For intervention research you require knowledge of the problem, read work around the practices, but also understand the broader field.

Grief and bereavement counselling are offered by trained professionals/councillors/therapists, religious workers and volunteers. Globally many organisations specialise in such support, counselling and sometimes even education e.g., Grief Australia, Novia Scotia palliative care bereavement support program, St Francis Hospice and the Vereniging Leven met Dood in The Netherlands. Their programs are based on disciplinary training, practical guidelines and experience, evidence-based decisions and creativity. Many textbooks and practical guides are available (Coenen and Pimas, 2020; Worden, 2018). These programs rely strongly on components and activities associated with information behaviour such as information sources, information provision, information sharing and knowledge of what information grieving people need and how they seek information (Dias et al., 2019; Paun and Cothran, 2019). Information behaviour as the field of study that can inform such interventions are, however, seldom explicitly acknowledged.

Timely and appropriate information and support, based on knowledge of information needs and information behaviour can make a difference to quality of life, coping and making sense. There are many contexts where information behaviour is understudied... Grieving is an ongoing process that can benefit from more appropriate information support and understanding (Fourie, 2020).

A deep contextualised more holistic understanding of the complexities of information behaviour in grief and bereavement is required to fully benefit from information interventions integrated with other support (Fourie, 2020).

Grief and bereavement counselling and information behaviour can both inform each other; their models and theories can open new opportunities for interdisciplinary and intervention research. This short paper was inspired by a query from an organisation offering counselling to the bereaved; they wanted to know if there are more work similar to what the author discussed in an earlier paper (Fourie, 2020). The work of Kochen et al. (2020), Hutti and Limbo (2019), Stroebe (2001) and Supiano (2019) show that alignment with theories and models can support grief and bereavement counselling and information interventions. Some general discussions on
models and theories and textbooks can shed deeper light (Balk, 1996; Bath 2009; Brown, 2019; Fasse et al., 2014; Gillies and Neimeyer, 2006).

The question that guided this paper is thus:
Which models and theories regarding grief and bereavement (including counselling) research can guide information interventions and how can these inform information behaviour research related to grief and bereavement counselling?

This is a short paper reporting on work in progress. The clarification of core concepts, methodology followed, the analysis and findings, a matrix of theories and models, recommendations and a conclusion are presented.

Clarification of concepts
Bereavement and bereavement counselling
Bereavement refers to the state of loss; mostly when a loved one dies. A person in bereavement needs to adapt to the loss, recover and live in a new reality in which the deceased is absent, and where individuals learn to live without what they have lost (Medlineplus, 2020). ‘Bereavement counselling refers to counselling offered to individuals who have suffered a loss, typically the death of a loved one, in order to help the bereaved through the process of mourning and recovery’ (‘Bereavement Counseling’).

Grief and grief counselling
Grief follows the loss of something, most notably the loss of a person passing away. It is strongly related to death and dying. It is ‘a natural multifaceted, multi-occurring response that individuals experience throughout their lives to a variety of losses, most notably the death of someone with whom a close bond of affection was shared such as a father grieving the loss of a child or a child grieving the loss of a parent’ (Fourie, 2020 citing Aho et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2015). It can become long and complicated (Mason and Toftthagen, 2019). The concept grief counselling is often used interchangeably with bereavement counselling.

It is ‘a form of psychotherapy that aims to help people cope with the physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and cognitive responses to loss. These experiences are commonly thought to be brought on by a loved person’s death...’ (Wikipedia; Worden, 2018).

Information behaviour
Information behaviour refers to all information-related activities and encounters, including information seeking, information searching, browsing, recognising and expressing information needs, information encountering, information avoidance, information processing, information sharing and information use (Julien and Fourie, 2014): the definition was developed from the work of Case, Given, Savolainen and Wilson.

Method
The paper is based on a scoping review of literature from applicable disciplines (health, social work, religion, psychology, library/information science) for theories and models reported in grief and bereavement counselling and bereavement information support and intervention design. The focus is on information behaviour and all related information activities. Although a wealth of literature on grief and bereavement is available from health, psychological, religious and social work sciences and adjacent fields (Coenen and Pimas, 2020; Harris and Winokuer, 2019; Steffen et al., 2023; Worden, 2018), grief and bereavement and related counselling and support are still understudied in terms of information behaviour. Some work from Library and Information Science that was published since 2020 include Abidin (2022), Conner et al. (2022), Dominguez-Rodriguez et al. (2023), Douglas et al. (2022), Hamdan and Sayyed (2022), Justice (2021), May (2023), Morley (2023), Poor et al. (2022), Pretorius et al. (2020), Sengupta and Tacheva (2021) and Choi et al. (2023). The focus is on social media (Facebook, Instagram, online support, Internet searching), grief support for a colleague and a grief collection in a hospital library. The only two studies I could trace that is explicitly related to information behaviour are Zimmerman (2023) reporting on the needs of suicide survivors and Dinneen et al. (2024) that writes from the
Many of the models in information behaviour might hold potential for information behaviour research in grief and bereavement counselling, but none are explicitly positioned as such. I thus moved to the literature of supporting disciplines to identify relevant theories and models. Databases searched include all the EbscoHost and Proquest databases to which the institutional Library subscribes (including Library and Information Science Abstracts [LISA], Library and Information Science Technology Abstracts [LISTA], Emerald Insight, ScienceDirect and Web of Science). The following terms/truncated terms had to appear in the title of articles/conference papers: grief, griev*, bereave*, bereavement in combination with theor*, model*. Only full text articles/conference papers available in English were selected for further analysis. No restriction was placed on the date of publication.

Qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013) was applied to identify theories and models that could guide information interventions in grief and bereavement counselling as seen through an information behaviour lens. Titles and abstracts were analysed to identify theories and models that may hold value for work on information interventions and information behaviour research and the focus of where and how these were applied. In further work full-text papers will be analysed to identify constructs, components, activities, triggers and influences of information behaviour e.g. information needs, information activities, contexts, time, space.

Analysis and discussion
The content analysis focused only on titles and abstracts of documents. As shown in table 1, the theory that stood out most is the grief stage theory. Grief stage theory can inform work on time and temporality when studying contexts in information behaviour studies on grief and bereavement and it would be important to consider when planning information interventions for different stages of grief. Other theories mentioned in Table 1 address a variety of issues that would require a closer look when proceeding with the research. Such work needs to be assessed in detail as structure for what is presented in this paper. There are also more comprehensive discussions of theory and models in grief and bereavement that need to be considered (e.g., Bonanno, 2001).

Table 1 presents the theories holding the most potential for further exploration and intervention research specifically targeting information interventions approached from an information behaviour perspective. Some of the theories are based on activities that falls under information behaviour e.g. the sharing of memories (that might be interpreted as information) through therapeutic writing (Den Elzen, 2021) or forms of information that needs to be considered e.g. cues as mentioned by Boddez (2018) who also brings in knowledge and learning in a discussion on the application of conditioning theory. Other theories such as experiential theory based on the work of Kolb have featured in information behaviour research such as the work of Kuhlthau (1999) on the information search process. Some theories can be explored to determine how they can highlight triggers and influences of information behaviour. This is true for amongst other the attachment and emotional security theories. Theory of motivated information management (Droser, 2020) has been used in studies on information seeking.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Focus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attachment theory</td>
<td>Field et al. (2005)</td>
<td>Continuation of bonds in bereavement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jacobs et al. (1987)</td>
<td>Multiple dimensions of death</td>
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<td>Conditioning theory</td>
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<td>Dialogical self-theory</td>
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<td>Experiential theory</td>
<td>Hogan et al. (1996)</td>
<td>Experiential theory of bereavement</td>
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<td>Grief theory</td>
<td>Adolfsson and Larsson (2010)</td>
<td>Swedish women’s experiences after early miscarriage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Granek (2010)</td>
<td>Evolution of grief theory in psychology</td>
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<td>Grief stage theory</td>
<td>Bonanno and Boerner (2007)</td>
<td>Discussion of the theory</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cohen (2018)</td>
<td>Music and Pink Floyd</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Daniel (2023)</td>
<td>Persistence of the theory</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Holland and Neimeyer (2010)</td>
<td>Grief among individuals bereaved by natural and violent cause</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maciejewski et al. (2007)</td>
<td>Empirical examination</td>
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<td>Mindfulness-to-meaning theory</td>
<td>Williams et al. (2021)</td>
<td>Posttraumatic growth in the context of grief</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal construct theory of death and loss</td>
<td>Viney (1991)</td>
<td>Use in individually oriented grief therapy</td>
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<td>Planned behaviour perspective</td>
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<td>Psychodynamic theories</td>
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<td>Ritual theory</td>
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<td>Self-determination theory</td>
<td>Lumb et al. (2017)</td>
<td>Posttraumatic growth and bereavement</td>
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<td>Self-compassion theoretical model</td>
<td>Zhang et al. (2023)</td>
<td>Intervention for caregivers of children in parentally bereaved families</td>
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<td>Theory of grief recovery (TOGR)</td>
<td>Nolan and Hallam (2019)</td>
<td>Paradigm toward our understanding of grief and loss</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theory of motivated information management</td>
<td>Droser (2020)</td>
<td>Information seeking and grief in bereaved emerging adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turbulence theory</td>
<td>Tian and Solomon (2020)</td>
<td>Women’s grief following miscarriage</td>
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Table 1. Theories holding the most potential for further exploration in intersecting information behaviour and grief and bereavement counselling and intervention research

Both theories and models can inform and guide research (Given et al., 2023). That applies for research in information behaviour as well as research on grief and bereavement.

Table 2 presents the models from grief and bereavement literature holding the most potential for further exploration and information intervention research from information behaviour perspectives. Models that stood out are the dual process model and the two-track model of bereavement. Other models cover a variety of aspects that require further investigation.

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<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Focus</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance-disclosure model of LGBT</td>
<td>Bristowe et al. (2023)</td>
<td>LGBT and bereavement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adaptive model of grief</td>
<td>Gamino et al. (2000)</td>
<td>A grief study working towards an adaptive model of grief</td>
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<td>Attachment and loss (models)</td>
<td>Fraley and Bonanno (2004)</td>
<td>Comparing three models with relation to attachment-related avoidance and adaptation to bereavement Relationships and grief in older adults Complicated grief including the role of avoidance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attachment path model</td>
<td>Kho et al. (2015)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attachment-based model</td>
<td>Shear et al. (2007)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATTEND Model</td>
<td>Thieleman et al. (2014)</td>
<td>Traumatic bereavement and mindfulness</td>
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<td>Bereavement model</td>
<td>Alaszewski et al. (2004)</td>
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<td>Bronfenbrenner biocological model</td>
<td>Chachar et al. (2021)</td>
<td>Death and grief among children during the COVID-19 pandemic</td>
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<td>Care model</td>
<td>Gilbert et al. (2021)</td>
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<td>Cognitive attachment model</td>
<td>MacCallum and Bryant (2013)</td>
<td>Integration of attachments, memory and identity</td>
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<td>Cognitive behaviour couple therapy-REBT model</td>
<td>Malkinson and Brask-Rustad (2013)</td>
<td>Traumatic bereavement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive-constructivist model</td>
<td>Neimeyer (2006)</td>
<td>Complicated grief and the reconstruction of meaning</td>
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<td>Cross-cultural model of grief</td>
<td>Klass (1999)</td>
<td>A review</td>
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<tr>
<td>Five-factor model</td>
<td>Goetter et al. (2019)</td>
<td>Bereaved adults with and without complicated grief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Type</td>
<td>References</td>
<td>Description</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Interpersonal neurobiological-informed treatment model | Crenshaw (2006)  
Bennett et al. (2010)  
Calabria and Cheswick (2023)  
Cantwell-Bartl (2018)  
Caserta and Lund (2007)  
Chen et al. (2019)  
Fasse and Zech (2016)  
Fiore (2021)  
Green et al. (2021)  
Lund et al. (2010)  
McKiernan et al. (2018)  
McManus et al. (2018)  
Richardson (2010)  
Stroeb and Schut (1999)  
Yu, et al. (2022) | Childhood traumatic grief  
Coping with bereavement  
Cognitive and behavioural strategies to support a man with mild-moderate learning disabilities  
Parents whose child has a constant life-threatening disability  
Widowed life and coping with bereavement  
Mothers coping with bereavement in the 2008 China earthquake  
Subjective experiences of bereaved spouses  
Systematic review  
Art therapy with grieving children  
Experiences and early coping of bereaved spouses and partners  
Young people's relationship breakups  
Restoration and loss after disaster  
Length of caregiving and well-being among older widowers  
Coping with bereavement: rationale and description of the model  
COVID-19 bereaved Individuals |
| Dual process model                     | Kissane et al. (1998)  
Tatsuno et al. (2012)  
Horacek (1995)  
Papadatou (2000)  
Redinhaugh (2001)  
Chow (2010)  
Guldin and Leget (2023)  
Stroeb and Schut (2015)  
Moos (1995)  
Walsh et al. (2008)  
Smith and Ehlers (2020)  
Beechem et al. (1996) | Promoting healthy family functioning during palliative care and bereavement  
Families who experienced acute bereavement in Japan  
Grief after high-grief deaths  
Health professionals' grieving process  
Health care professionals' grief: a model based on occupational style and coping  
Anticipatory anniversary effects  
An interprofessional attempt to understand loss and grief  
Family matters in bereavement  
Modelling grief  
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Loss, grief and addition |
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<tr>
<th>Meaning making model</th>
<th>Wortmann and Park (2009)</th>
<th>Religion/spirituality and change in meaning after bereavement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mediational model</td>
<td>Currier et al. (2006), Milman et al. (2019), Yu et al. (2016)</td>
<td>Sense-making, grief, and the experience of violent loss Prolonged grief and the disruption of meaning Continuing bonds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mindfulness-based bereavement care model</td>
<td>Cacciatore and Flint (2012)</td>
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<td>Model of adjustment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Model(s) of linear and cyclical grief</td>
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<td>Different approaches to different experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Model for understanding</td>
<td>Batten and Oltjenbruns (1999)</td>
<td>Adolescent sibling bereavement as a catalyst for spiritual development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental grief model</td>
<td>Klass and Marwit (1988)</td>
<td>An attempt to develop a parental grief model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process based model</td>
<td>Yehene et al. (2021)</td>
<td>Caregivers’ grief in acquired non-death interpersonal loss</td>
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<td>Reflective self (model)</td>
<td>Nerken (1993)</td>
<td>Loss resolution and growth</td>
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<td>Self-compassion model for intervention</td>
<td>Zhang et al. (2023)</td>
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<td>Process model of stigmatised loss</td>
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<td>Support group model</td>
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<td>Bereaved family members in the bereavement life review Adapting the model to the bereavement process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two-track model of bereavement</td>
<td>Malkinson et al. (2006), Manevich et al. (2023), McDuffie et al. (2022), Malkinson et al. (2006), Rubin et al. (2017), Rubin (1999), Rubin et al. (2021)</td>
<td>Therapeutic issues and the relationship to the deceased Risk and resilience and dementia grief among spouses of people living with cognitive decline African American adults Therapeutic issues and the relationship to the deceased Bereavement and traumatic bereavement Overview, retrospect and prospect. Dementia grief (TTM-DG): continuing bond in sickness and in death</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Models holding the most potential for further exploration in intersecting information behaviour and grief and bereavement counselling and intervention research

**Results and recommendations**

Tables 1 and 2 show a spectrum of theories and models that need to be mapped to theories and models in the field of information behaviour and to information activities that need to be studied e.g. recognition of information needs, information sharing – the issues that need to be addressed in grief and bereavement interventions. It is evident that information processing and progress in the process of grieving are very important. Further in-depth work can pave the way for both theoretical/conceptual development of models to reflect information behaviour in the processes of grief and bereavement counselling as well as intervention research with organisations involved in grief and bereavement counselling.

**Conclusion**

Information behaviour research should continue to strive in conceptually and theoretically informing grief and bereavement information interventions, practices and work in grief and bereavement counselling. An understanding of how the theories and models reported in grief and bereavement counselling, interventions and research can be used is, however, essential.

**About the author**

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Websites
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St Francis Hospice Dublin (https://www.sfh.ie/)
Vereniging Leven met Dood (www.vereniginglevenmetdood.nl)