

EXPLORING COMFORT & CONNECTION IN PALLIATIVE CARE

Participant produced photographs

Exploring comfort and connection in palliative care

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Experiences of illness and hospitalisation can mean that patients and families feel disconnected, or miss familiar people, places, and things. It is important to continue to improve how hospitals and health services support patient and family experiences of comfort and connection.

Our research study explored experiences of connection and familiarity for palliative care patients and their families/carers, including what it means to feel connected (or disconnected) from people, places and things that matter. Our aim is to use the knowledge generated to provide new insights as to how hospitals can best enhance experiences of comfort, connection and familiarity for patients and families within palliative care.

If you have questions about the study, or feedback, you can contact the lead researcher:
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Or St Vincent's Hospital Research Office
phone: 02 8382 4960, email: svhs.research@svha.org.au

All research in Australia involving humans is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethics aspects of this research project have been approved by the HREC of St Vincent's Health: 2021/ETH01190

The research team

Prof Emma Kirby is a UNSW Scientia Associate Professor in the Centre for Social Research in Health in the Faculty of Arts, Design, and Architecture at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. She is a sociologist who focuses on experiences of health, illness, and care.





Dr Rebecca McLaughlan is a Senior Lecturer in Professional Practice and Architectural Design at the University of Sydney. Her research explores care environments and the processes through which architects create architectures of care.

Professor Richard Chye is the Director of Supportive and Palliative Care at St Vincent's Hospital. He has worked in the field for 30 years, and has integrated community, inpatient, hospital consultative, and private palliative care services across Eastern Sydney.





Frances Bellemore is a Registered Nurse and Senior Clinical Trial Coordinator at Sacred Heart Supportive and Palliative Care at St Vincent's Hospital. She has clinical and research experience and currently works across a variety of research projects with universities and hospital settings.

Julie Gissing (L) and Robyn Swanson (R) are Managers of the Biography Service at Sacred Heart Supportive and Palliative Care. The service has run since 2009, and since then the number of trained biography volunteers has grown to 45.



Our research study aimed to explore how people in palliative care, and their families, experience comfort and connection in different ways, when at home and when in hospital.

As part of this research, we asked selected participants to take some photographs.

We wanted these photos to tell the story of the spaces, places, people, material items, or memories, that evoke feelings of comfort, of connection, of familiarity, of feeling cared for, by patients and family members.

In what follows, we see a selection of the photos captured by our participants. These are their photos, and their words.

These photos show us things that symbolise comfort and connection. Things that matter.



Nourishment



It's just a couple of rugs
That you take from home
It brings the brightness of the outside into your room.
And that connects you more

The blanket
The coat
The slippers
Things that keep me warm
The idea of being snug
Is a nice feeling







Peaceful
Happy memories



How can you make someone feel at home in a place that is so distant?

Things from home lift your energy. That gentleness makes me calm



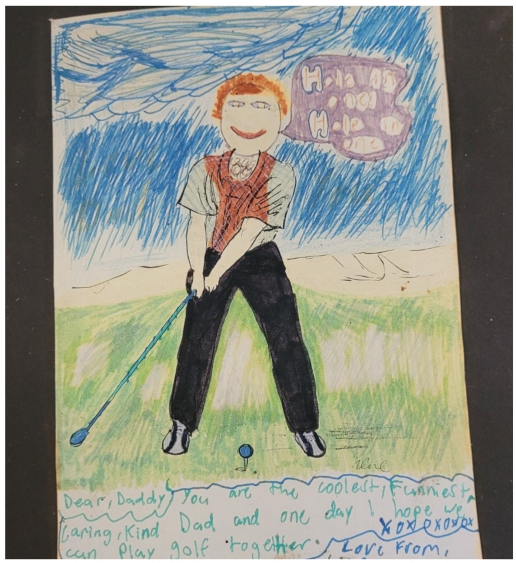




It's nice to have an area to escape to other than the bedroom
I sit there for half an hour and I feel restored



My relationship with my son
It's very important to me
He loves me, I miss him
He lives interstate
We like to play golf together -
it's a good walk ruined!



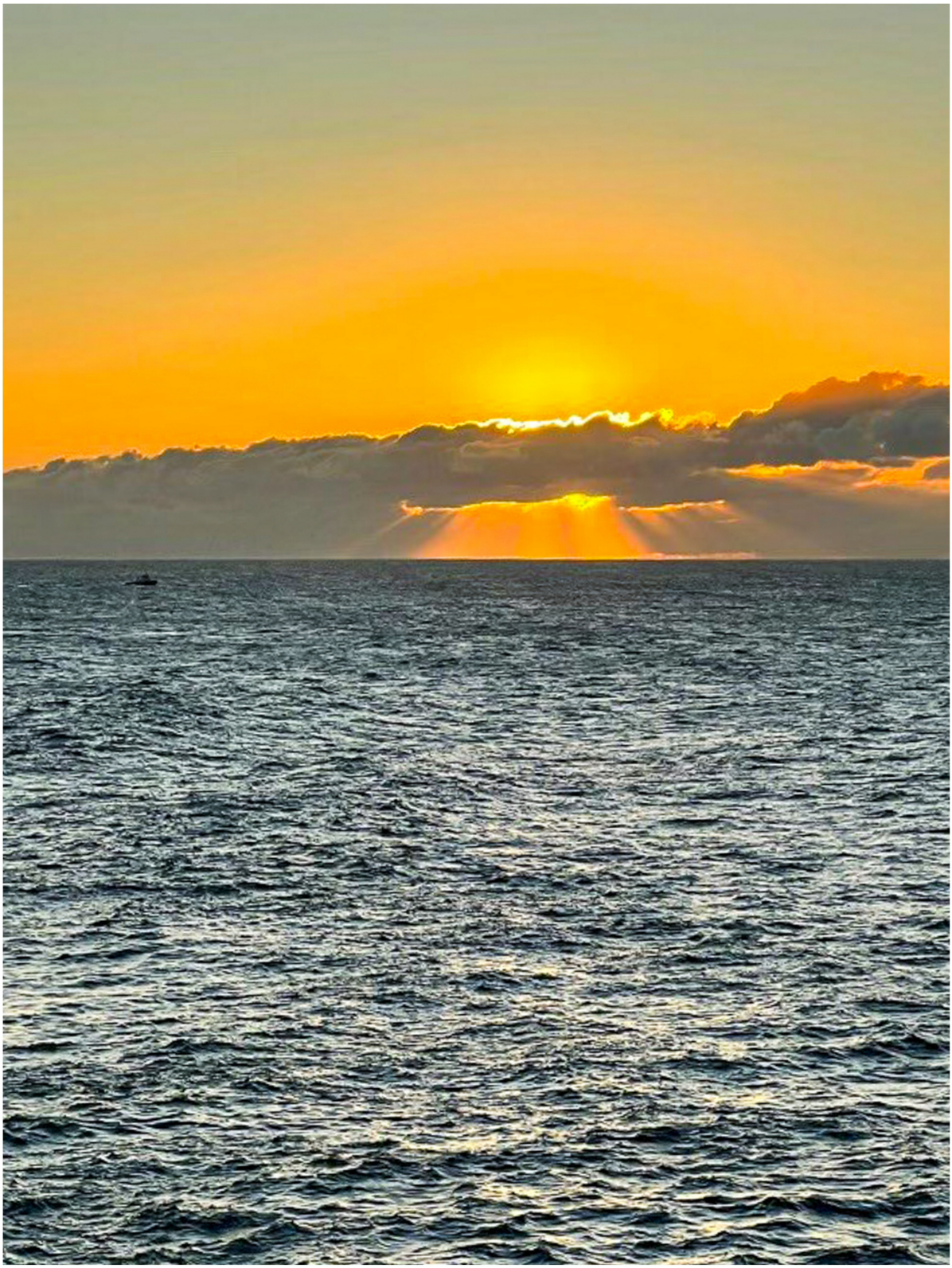


I get to see my family again
There's this sense of relief
That all I have to do now is wait
And then I get to the airport, and get to go home
And see my family

Some gentle music on in the background. It's nice to have that when you're in a space of noise and practicality







Where's that sun coming from, bringing all that warmth and light?
And where's the ocean going to?
All that water, constantly moving...



I've always had a love of plants
Keep maintaining them
Growing up in a rural farming area
I really had an appreciation of nature and being outside
It's never left me, a love of the beauty of plants

We bring a little goodie bag
With the things that she likes
Every time she needs to go into hospital
Face creams, moisturisers, things that make her feel not so detached from being at home



My life in Sydney is completely medicalised
I have so many appointments

Getting to the country feels different

In my older age
To have the comfort
Of doing some of the things that are familiar to my youth
Like feeding the cows
Its integral to who I am as a person

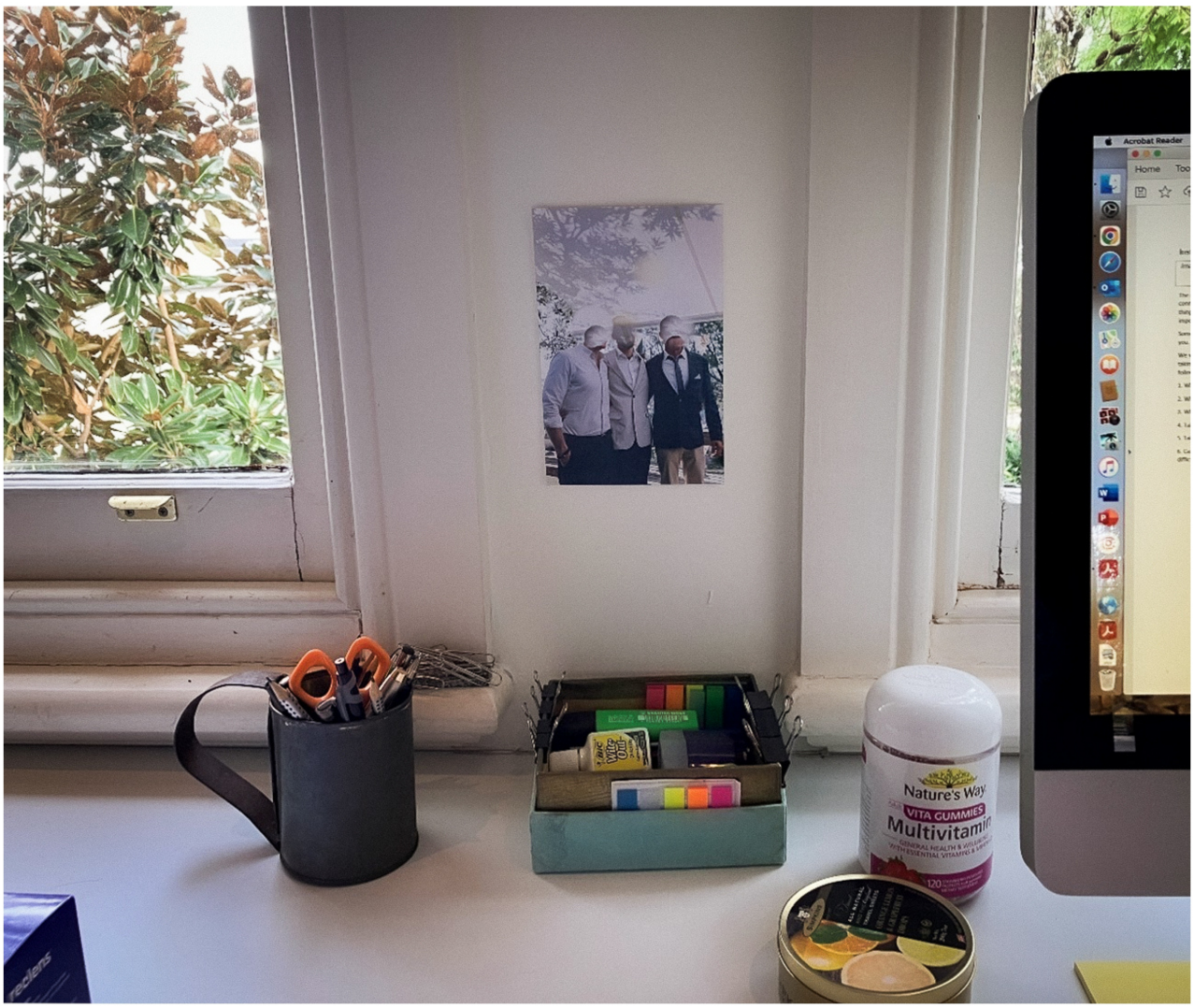




Keeping contact
With friends
With family
With the outside world
People care
That wonderful immediate source of communication

There's just one petal that's got a little blemish on it
How beautiful life is
But there's always just a little bit of....
Nothing is perfect ever in life





This is where I spend a lot of my time
I sit here
And I look out
And I've got my sons there, and my stuff
It gives me solace
Its my space



Everyone is in masks
And their plastic capes
The contrast between inside
And all of the chemicals and busyness
And outside these fronds
To be able to look out to the outside world
That was important



Tea. It changes your feeling

Routine, wherever you are



There's that routine
The coming and the going of the waves
And the whoosh

Morning time
North-east facing
It just changes the atmosphere completely
Being here makes me feel incrediibly secure





The seasons change
That is part of life



Every day is very precious for us
Every life has a different stage



Holidays. Family. Fun
Good health
Good times



How time has passed for me
A lot of different things have happened
A lot of changes







I love to sit there
And have fish and chips
Its just a nice something to go and do
On a saturday arvo



A hobby that I can enjoy
For me to play music for my mum

This reminds me of my travel
Travel has made a huge difference to my life
I met people, felt connection to people
Who were completely different to me
It makes me more empathetic





This to me is comfort
The comfort of food
The comfort of television
The comfort of a partner
The comfort of a dog
The comfort of home



There is always life to see outside



Nature is so lasting
It changes and we accept it
If you sit in it for a while you feel an enormous sense of peace



"Don't forget my comb"

Brushing my hair when I was younger
Now I brush hers



Out and about
Sunny day
Sitting by myself
Life goes on

Isn't it great?





Fresh air on the balcony
Being connected to home
Clearing the mind with the familiar setting



It's a bit corny I suppose
But having the harbour
And the trees
And the park
Nature
The whole relaxing







"Bring the dog"
Mum needed a pillow rest - he's been with mum since the beginning of everything



Good memories

"Get me the bear": warmth

Reminds me that I'm at home



Reminds me of a time when we were able to go out
For lunch
For a walk
When the weather was hot
A familiar place that we could always go to
Makes me feel happy

All my family are in Queensland
I haven't been up this year
Because I've been too sick
It's a bit too far
Just out of our reach

The world just gets a little bit smaller





Happy memories give me a feeling of comfort
My dad would read them to me

This is about coming home and being together

As you go through life
You adapt to family
Everyone's lives get complicated
You adapt as family





Even though she is in hospital or wherever she is overnight
If I bring it along, it sort of helps a little bit

THANK YOU!

We would like to express our sincerest gratitude to the participants for sharing their experiences with us.

Project team:
A/Prof Emma Kirby
Dr Rebecca McLaughlan
Prof Richard Chye
Frances Bellemore
Julie Gissing
Robyn Swanson