

“They were taking it home with them...” Experiences of hospice staff away from the frontlines during the emergency COVID-19 pandemic: a qualitative secondary analysis study

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Background: The Covid-19 pandemic presented different challenges and work pressures for hospice staff. Research on hospice staff mainly explores their professional roles and responsibilities as they continued to work during the emergency public health period, often overlooking the personal experiences and challenges they encountered outside of this.

Aim: This qualitative study aims to explore the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the home life of hospice staff and enable a deeper understanding of their experiences.

Methods: In-depth interviews of hospice staff (n=25) conducted across seven hospices explored the impacts and implications of the pandemic on hospice care. This qualitative study involved secondary reflexive thematic analysis of this interview dataset.

Results: Three main themes were identified: (1) Blurred margins: Participants discussed facing difficulty separating work and home life and taking stresses and thoughts about work home. (2) Loneliness and social interactions: Staff described being anxious and lonely during this period, and not feeling like socialising after demanding workdays. (3) Withdrawal from family and personal commitments: Some staff felt unable to see or support their parents, partners and children during the pandemic and subsequent negative psychological and emotional effects on them.

Conclusion: Hospice staff compromised aspects of their home life and personal commitments during the pandemic to carry out their role at work. Workplaces and organisations should aim to support hospice staff more broadly to help with managing work-related pressures and balancing personal commitments as we enter a more demanding palliative care era and in preparation for unprecedented pressures including future pandemics.

