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## **In our own words: A qualitative study of Bachelor and Master of Social Work interns at Vitas Hospice**

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IN OUR OWN WORDS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF  
BACHELOR AND MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK  
INTERNS AT VITAS HOSPICE

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

---

by  
Martha Elizabeth Romero  
September 2009

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Martha Elizabeth Romero

September 2009

Approved by:

  
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6/11/09  
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of Bachelor/Master of Social Work (BSW/MSW) interns who completed a full year internship at Vitas Hospice in San Bernardino. Using the post positivist paradigm, the researcher interviewed nine previous BSW/MSW interns to find out about their experiences as interns while at Vitas Hospice.

The study was conducted by interviewing the nine interns and their responses were used to develop a theory of the interns' experience. The interviews were the qualitative data that was used and later analyzed to find the common themes. The result of the data analysis revealed that the interns' at Vitas hospice share a common experience. These experiences led to learning about what was helpful and what was not helpful for their development as social workers as a result of their field placement at Vitas. The interns were able to share about their experience and suggestions they had for the Vitas internship program.

This study contributes to social work practice on a micro and macro level. The interns shared their experience as to what they benefit from and they also

shared their recommendations for the field placement. It provided a voice from the interns themselves as to what works and what does not. This study will benefit agencies that provide field placements for interns and the social workers that supervise them to develop effective internship programs that assist interns to develop those skills that are valuable in the field as they both collaborate in this learning process. This in turn will help them provide better services for their interns and to the client population they serve. Ultimately, it would provide a guide for future social work students/interns and this guide may be used as a tool to gain insight into the field placement experience as a Vitas hospice BSW/MSW intern social worker.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following people:

Dr. McCaslin, for helping me through this process. Thanks for your time and patience. It is greatly appreciated.

Lorraine Hedtke, for inspiring this project. Thank you for the dedication and the love you share with your students. I am forever grateful that I had the opportunity to work with you.

BSW/MSW Interns, thank you for sharing your experiences with me. It was great to learn from you and put your words on paper. May you continue to be inspired through the love you have for the social work profession and the patients/clients you will meet along this journey.

My cohort. In the past three years I have learned a great amount from you all. You have been an inspiration for me to continue to seek knowledge and be a competent social worker.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to God for his guidance and strength. Leo Ramirez thanks for sharing this journey with me. My mother, stepfather and siblings I love you. May you be inspired and motivated to be the best that you can be. Todo es posible, si puedes creer!

Most of all I dedicate this to Vitas Hospice and Lorraine Hedtke. Through Vitas Hospice bereavement support group I reconnected to my father Ricky who passed away several years ago. Daddy I love you. I know that you are proud of me. Dad thanks for always being with me.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ASSESSMENT

#### Introduction

This chapter discusses the research focus, the different experiences of BSW/MSW interns at VITAS hospice in San Bernardino. It also explains the post positivist paradigm, which is the perspective that was utilized to conduct the study. This chapter also discusses the literature review on the experiences of interns in field placement. It also describes the contributions that this study will make in social work, both at macro and micro levels.

#### Research Focus and Question

The focus of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of BSW/MSW interns in a hospice field placement. Based on the growing number of students, BSW/MSW programs are in need of agencies that are willing to provide learning opportunities for interns. Therefore, it is important for research to focus on the needs of interns, specifically in hospice care, as they will continue to provide much needed resources for many hospice agencies. By learning the needs of the interns

the hospice agency may be able to retain interns interested in this field and provide much needed care for their patients and families. Research must focus on what the interns have to say about their experiences and how agencies can benefit by listening to and learning from their interns. The study focused on exploring conversations with the interns. These conversations were analyzed and common themes were explored, and the theory of the experiences of BSW/MSW interns in a hospice field placement was developed.

#### Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

The perspective that was used in the study was the post positivist paradigm. This perspective was relevant to the study focus as it "takes an inductive exploratory approach to understanding an objective reality" (Morris, 2006, p. 71). The BSW/MSW interns were asked questions about what was helpful and what was not helpful in their field placement at Vitas hospice. They were also asked about their overall field placement experience. Their responses were essential in the development of the theory based on the intern experience.

The data collected, the interviews with the interns, are qualitative. The data was used to build a theory about interns' experiences while at Vitas hospice. This study did not follow a specific hypothesis but rather allowed the data to interpret itself through a process of discovering common themes that unified the study focus.

In this study the post positivist paradigm was effective to utilize as it recognizes that there are objective truths to discover through qualitative data gathering (Morris, 2006). In using qualitative research, there was more opportunity to get rich, detailed information that might be missed in a positivist study.

The goal and role of the researcher consisted of a learner's perspective and the interns were the experts. The post positivist researcher takes an exploratory approach to the focus of the study. In using this perspective the researcher asked the interns what she could learn from their experiences as interns.

### Literature Review

In this section previous research conducted on the different experiences that intern's may have is discussed. "Since the interpretation of the data will be

a mixture of the science of synthesis of information and the art of intuition, the researcher needs to consciously develop a mature understanding of the topic by not only reviewing the literature but also consulting with the experts" (Morris, 2006, p. 83). The literature review and an interview with an expert were conducted to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the study focus.

The literature review discusses the history of field instruction in social work, initial phases of field work placement, student learning processes, student satisfaction with field, problems experienced in field, learning styles of student and field instructor, the hospice setting, and theories guiding conceptualization. The literature review includes the interview with Lorraine Hedtke, the bereavement manager and BSW/MSW field instructor from Vitas hospice in San Bernardino.

History of Field Placement in Social Work

Field instruction has played a major role of social work training from the beginning of the social work profession. According to the Field Instruction Manual: A guide for social work students (Royse, Dhooper, & Rompf, 1996), "its history goes back to the days of the charity organization societies in the last quarter of the

nineteenth century, when students learned social work by apprenticeship. Through this experience students obtained firsthand knowledge of poverty and adverse social conditions" (Royse, Dhooper, & Rompf, 1996, p. 2).

According to the field instructional manual, educational standards for field instruction were refined in the 1940's and the 1950's, and field work became known as field instruction. The American Association of Schools for Social Work (the forerunner of the Council on Social Work Education) took the position that field teaching was just as important as classroom teaching and demanded equally qualified teachers and definite criteria for the selection of field agencies (Royse, Dhooper, & Rompf, 1996).

Also, the Council on Social Work Education, formed in 1952, established and revised standards for institutions granting degrees in social work. These standards required a clear plan for the organization, implementation, and evaluation of both in-class work and the field practicum (Royse, Dhooper, & Rompf, 1996).

Although there are some differences among social work programs in how field placement is implemented, each

accredited program must meet standards set by the CSWE (Royse, Dhooper, & Rompf, 1996).

### Initial Phases of Field Work

According to Fortune and Abramson (1993), students believe that practicum is "the most significant, most productive, most memorable component of social work education" (p. 95). Many aspects of the field experience contribute to its powerful impact on students (Fortune & Abramson, 1993).

A great field placement is a match between the student, the placement setting, and the specific educational objectives and outcomes for the student. Student interests that should be considered are the population they want to work with, the level of social work practice-individual, family, groups or the larger community, the challenges that clients will be experiencing and also the individual strengths and challenges the student brings to the practicum experience (Liley, 2002).

The process requires understandings and agreements. The student becomes a full partner in the transactional process and interacts freely with both the field setting

and the academic world in all phases of the learning experience, from placement to termination (Welsh, 1979).

Students are guaranteed that they will have a field placement that will provide appropriate educational opportunities for them. At the same time, field instructors are provided with an opportunity not to take a student if they believe that the nature of their setting would not lend itself to a useful learning experience for that student (Welsh, 1979). Social work students assume proactive responsibility for and partner in this adventure (Liley, 2002).

#### Student Learning Processes in Field

Field education is the most significant and essential process of the education for social work practice. In the field, is where students begin to develop those practice skills, translate theory from the classroom into practice, and test their ability to be professional social workers (Fortune, McCarthy, & Abramson, 2001).

A quantitative study conducted in 2001 with sixty-four MSW students at one northeastern urban social work program, focused on learning activities that may contribute to the learning process in field. This study

examined whether these eleven learning activities are related to students perception of the quality of field instruction, their satisfaction with field education, and their performance. These eleven learning opportunities include "observing others in professional roles, co-therapy with field instructor or other professional, using one-way mirrors, role plays, explanations by field instructor, making connections to theory, making connections to classroom work, reading recommended readings, requesting you to critique your own work, feedback on audio or videotapes and feedback on process recordings" (Fortune, McCarthy, & Abramson, 2001, p. 114).

The findings of this study suggest that students should have the opportunity to do (hands-on) and observe (co-therapy/observing staff/shadowing) and field instructors should help the students make the connection with practicing those hands-on skills to a conceptual framework through the activities of explanation, connection to classroom work and theory, feedback, and self-critique. However, the frequencies of such activities, as reported by the students who participated in the study, do not appear to be related to the

student's performance of those social work skills (Fortune, McCarthy, & Abramson, 2001).

The results of the study suggest that students do respond positively to learning activities that provide opportunities to observe and work with professional role models that provide them with contextual frameworks for what they are doing and learning (Fortune, McCarthy, & Abramson, 2001).

### Student Satisfaction

Student satisfaction with fieldwork is likely to influence student learning and may even be a necessary condition for learning (Fortune, & Abramson, 1993). Experience tells us that individuals tend to approach those situations that have proved gratifying in the past, and avoid those which have been experienced as disappointing. Thus, satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one's field experience is a crucial factor in student learning and socialization into the profession (Cimino, Cimino, Nuehring, Raybin, & Wisler-Waldlock, 1982).

Theories of job satisfaction are divided into two major orientations: content theories and process theories. From the content theory, job satisfaction is a result of fulfilling workers' needs. Process theories

view job satisfaction as a result of the interaction of the nature of the job with workers' needs, values, and expectations (Kissman & Van Tran, 1990).

One hundred graduate social work students who enrolled in a field practicum in the fall of 1985 at two universities in the south voluntarily participated in a cross-sectional survey designed to measure their satisfaction with field placement. Using a process theory the researchers theorized that satisfaction with their field placement depends on the students' ability to meet their educational needs and the nature of the assigned tasks in the field placement (Kissman & Van Tran, 1990).

This study identified significant sources of graduate social work students' overall satisfaction with field placement education. These sources included "student goal attainment, adequacy of case assignments, performance feedback, work autonomy, and perceived application of field learning to social work practice. It was also found that students' satisfaction with their field instructors was influenced by work autonomy and the helpfulness of field instructors. It was concluded that work autonomy was the only significant predictor of

students' satisfaction with their field placement" (Kissman & Van Tran, 1990, p. 29).

In another study, a survey of one hundred and one MSW students at a southern university examined factors associated with student satisfaction with field agency, field instructor, and field learning. It was found that students associated the quality of supervision and relevance of learning most highly with satisfaction in their placement experiences. It was also found that "being treated as a professional in the agency, school-agency linkages, student characteristics, and amount of time engaged in specific social work activities were found not to be major factors in student satisfaction with field work" (Fortune, Feathers, Rook, Scrimenti, Smolen, Stemerman, & Tucker, 1985, p. 97).

One hundred and forty-two graduate social work students at a medium-sized northern university who specialized in direct practice were part of a study that was seeking to determine the various factors associated with student satisfaction in their field placement. The factors that were found to contribute to satisfaction were "students' perceptions of the quality of field instruction, the desirability and involvement in the

agency, and didactic explanations from the field instructor. The findings highlight the importance of accessible, supportive supervision, active learning, and feedback and conceptual input into student learning" (Fortune & Abramson, 1993, p. 95).

Social work agencies provide field education in part because it gives them a pool of job applicants already trained in policies, procedures, philosophy and fundamentals of agency specific practice. Presumably, students who are satisfied with the education provided in fieldwork placements will be likely to accept employment following graduation (Showers, 1992).

A study of two hundred and thirty eight social work students in 27 New York hospital fieldwork programs examined how student satisfaction with fieldwork affects their willingness to accept employment in those hospitals. The study identified five areas of student satisfaction that are correlated with student willingness to accept employment. This study found that the supervisory relationship was most predictive of satisfaction with field instructors and willingness to accept a job after graduation (Showers, 1992).

### Problems Experienced in Field Placement

It is a regular practice for social work programs to place emphasis on teaching social work students interviewing skills and how to conduct client bio-psycho-social assessments prior to going out on the field. However, the results from a research study conducted with thirty nine social work students suggests "that equal emphasis needs to be given to teaching students how to survive and negotiate in workplace cultures" (Maidment, 2003, p. 51).

Students also reported feeling stressed when "there is a lack of clear expectations and role clarification, where relationship difficulties exist between the student and supervisor and where there is a lack of integration between theory and practice. Therefore, preparing students for field learning within this context requires recognition and acknowledgement that the current work place environment will include conditions that are both good and not so good in terms of facilitating student learning on placement" (Maidment, 2003, p. 51).

### Learning Styles

In the field placement student interns are placed in an agency under the supervision of a field instructor.

The field instructor is a social worker employed by the agency. The field instructor provides interns with opportunities for contact with various client populations and oversees their performance with assigned tasks (Royse, Dhooper, & Rompf, 1996).

Field instructors face the challenge of ensuring that students are able to integrate their knowledge and skills into competent practice. They accomplish this within the context of a supervisory relationship with the student. This involves an interactive process between field instructor and student (Van Soest & Kruzich, 1994).

Learning style is defined as a personally preferred way of dealing with information and experience that crosses content areas. The four defined learning styles are: accommodator, diverger, converger, and assimilator. The converger tends to perceive with the intellect and process actively. Appear to do best in situations where there is a single solution or correct answer to a problem. The greatest strength is the practical application of ideas. The diverger tends to perceive concretely with their senses and feelings and to process reflectively by watching. They excel in the ability to look at situations from many points of view and organize

many relationships into a meaningful whole. The assimilator tends to stand outside the experience and examine it. Their greatest strength lies in the ability to create theoretical models. The accommodator perceives concretely with the senses and feelings and process actively by jumping in and acting. Their greatest strength lies in actively carrying out plans and undertaking new experiences (Van Soest & Kruzich, 1994).

In a study of three social work programs and one hundred and forty-two pairs of field instructors and students it was hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between how field instructors and students perceive each other and the degree of similarity of their learning styles. It was expected that the more similar the learning styles of field instructor and student, the more positively each of them would perceive the quality of their relationship (Van Soest & Kruzich, 1994).

The results of this study indicated that field instructors and students share a common preference for the accommodator learning style. Also, it was discovered that when student and field instructor have a different learning style it is important for the student to meet at the beginning of the field placement to create an

individualized approach to match the students learning. The different ways of learning are discrete personal styles and it is essential that the field instructor be open to the fact that the student may perceive and process knowledge in different ways. There are students who must have hands-on experience in order to learn and others who learn in a different way (Van Soest & Kruzich, 1994).

### Hospice

Hospice in the United States has grown substantially as a means to deliver palliative care at the end of life, increasing from 160,000 patients in 1985 to more than 600,000 in 2000. The types of services that hospice care provides for patients include: medications and treatments (physician services, medical equipment/supplies, intravenous therapy, and dietary/nutritional services), rehabilitative therapy, emotional, social and spiritual support (bereavement, counseling, spiritual care pastoral care, respite care, companion services) and practical support (continuous home care, personal care, meals on wheels, volunteers, and household services). In the U.S. hospice care is usually delivered in the home (Smith, Seplaki, Biagtan, DuPreez, & Cleary, 2008).

According to Worthington (2008), "from its inception hospice was formed to help the dying deal with the pain, whether physical, psychological, social, or spiritual. This focus is quite different from that of conventional health care, which seeks to find the best cure. Hospice takes an interdisciplinary approach to care for the dying-an approach involving physicians, nurses, social workers, physical therapists, chaplains, and volunteers. Of primary focus to hospice is enabling patients to retain as much power as possible over their time remaining and helping families to adapt and adjust to the impending loss of loved ones" (Worthington, 2008, p. 19)

Eligibility for hospice includes a six month or less prognosis assuming one's illness runs its normal course and per certification by a physician of terminal prognosis. As a hospice social worker, there is generally little ambiguity regarding the goals of care. They are to provide compassionate and skilled end-of-life care by ensuring comfort, identifying and addressing any psychosocial, financial, spiritual, or family concerns in preparation for the patient's death (Lawson, 2007).

As the number of elderly person's increases, the social service needs of older Americans will continue to

grow too. Even more specifically, hospice social workers have received considerable attention given that they are well established as key providers of service at the end of life. As hospice care programs continue to expand, there is a great need for clinical social workers with specialized expertise to work in this environment (Lawson, 2007).

Social workers play key roles in hospice. As integral members of hospice interdisciplinary teams, they help patients and families cope with the psychosocial, emotional, financial, and planning aspects of end-of-life-care. Their role as described by the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization is to conduct psychosocial assessments, continuous psychosocial counseling, direct casework services, bereavement services, and community education, outreach and referral (Lawson, 2007).

As a hospice social worker, both the intimate environment of the patient's home and the culture of hospice demand the delivery of high quality, compassionate services that necessitate interdisciplinary teamwork. The physician, nurse, social worker, chaplain,

home health aide, volunteer, and other staff share these goals and recognize each other's work (Lawson, 2007).

A small qualitative study explored students' experience of learning within a palliative care team field placement. The findings of this study indicate that field placements within this type of setting provided valuable opportunities for inter-professional learning. The students had the opportunity to work with other health professional team members and they jointly assessed patients, developed treatment plans and contributed to discharge planning. They were also provided with the opportunity to take an active role in multidisciplinary (MDT) team meetings where they developed insight into patient centered care. Students were also exposed to a diverse range of team members than in other practice settings, including nurses, physicians, chaplains, volunteers and home health aides (Morris & Leonard, 2007).

As a result of their experience the students felt they had an increased understanding of the contribution made by the many different team members who were involved in the patient's care. "The diversity of the team within the palliative care setting lent itself to a holistic

approach to patient management as all aspects, including the spiritual and creative needs of patients were met" (Morris & Leonard, 2007, p. 569).

#### Interview with the Expert

An informal interview was conducted with the field placement coordinator Mrs. Lorraine Hedtke at Vitas Hospice in San Bernardino. Mrs. Lorraine Hedtke also serves as the bereavement manager at Vitas hospice and is a very knowledgeable licensed social worker.

Hedtke is a well-known leader in her community. The theoretical approach that she practices and teaches is narrative therapy. She has taught hundreds of people around the world about the narrative approach to death, dying and bereavement. She has also written many articles and is the co-author of two books: "Re-membering Lives (2004)" and "My grandmother is always with me (2004)".

Hedtke joined the team at Vitas Hospice in 2004. Like Hedtke, Vitas "is committed to quality of care of people as they are dying and families of loved ones after a death has occurred. Vitas hospice is the largest, and oldest hospice organization in the United States" (www.rememberingpractices.com, retrieved on May 19, 2009).

Hedtke is passionate about her student interns. She has been the intern coordinator since she started her career with Vitas. Hedtke teaches the interns what is at the heart of hospice social work. She challenges her students to think outside the box and she asks her students to challenge the traditional ways of viewing death. Hedtke values her students and empowers them. She is not a traditional educator but rather "a mover and a shaker". This is something she learned from her grandmother Louise who was also a social worker who throughout her career was involved in political and social causes.

Hedtke is an inspirational role model. It was encouraging to discuss the interns' experiences with someone who is wise and passionate about students' education, training, and development. Hedtke committed herself to supporting this study and was a great resource through this process.

Researching and reviewing the literature and speaking with Hedtke played an essential role in developing this study. This process allowed the researcher to gain valuable information about the internship program at Vitas hospice and the experiences

of interns. This helped developed the interview questions and gain access to the study participants.

## Theories Guiding Conceptualization

### Empowerment Theory

According to Turner (1996), the empowerment approach to social work practice "utilizes a unifying framework, presents an integrative, holistic approach to meeting the needs of members of oppressed groups" (Turner, 1996, p. 219) The oppressed groups consist of the poor, the working poor, people of color, physically handicapped, mentally handicapped, those who prefer sexual orientation that defies heterosexuality, and the elderly (Turner, 1996).

BSW/MSW interns work primarily with oppressed groups. The majority of the their clients come from families who need empowerment. The empowerment approach was used in this study because it focused on intern experiences and part of that experience is helping their clients, who in many cases lack power. As future leaders in the social work profession, the interns, throughout their academic education and field placement are

constantly encouraged to apply empowerment concepts when working with their client population.

In hospice work, "the social worker shall advocate for the needs, decisions, and rights of clients in palliative and end-of-life care. The social worker shall engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that people have equal access to resources to meet their bio-psycho-social needs (Altilio, Gardia, & Otis-Green, 2007, p. 72).

The majority of hospice clients "face a unique set of factors that contribute to a loss of power. At an individual level, they cope with a decline in their physical health, mental stress frequently as a result of depression, loss, and grief, and loss of social support systems including peers and spouses. Patients may view their problems as unique, personal, and theirs alone to solve. At a social level, many patients cope with economic loss from illness, rising health care costs, poor housing, discrimination resulting from ageism, loss of status and contributory roles, political marginalization, continuing socio-political disadvantages for members of minority populations, and a disempowering

medical model" (Altilio, Gardia, & Otis-Green, 2007, p. 72).

Patient's independence and privacy, needs to be valued, and is at the core of empowerment. Many patients choose to die in their homes where they have lived their whole lives; to own that and make that decision is empowerment.

#### Potential Contribution of Study to Micro and Macro Social Work Practice

This study creates an understanding of the interns experience while at Vitas hospice field placement. This experience contributes to knowledge for social work with interns. At the micro level this knowledge will help field instructors who are social workers to create field placement opportunities, effective supervision, and manage those already existing internship programs to cater to these intern's specific needs.

When looking at the macro level this knowledge will help agencies develop field placement programs in their agencies. It will help agencies as a whole to most effectively work in collaboration with the universities while also helping the agency with budget costs.

## Summary

This chapter focused on presenting the study focus, interns' experiences. It described the post positivist paradigm, which is the perspective that was used in this study. The study is an exploratory study that explores the experiences that interns had in their field placement at Vitas hospice.

This chapter also included the literature review, which discussed what is known about student interns and their field placement experience. Empowerment theory was also explained as it applies to this topic. This chapter also discussed micro and macro practice connections that this study may present for the social work field.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PLANNING

#### Introduction

Chapter Two explains the engagement process with the gatekeeper and the study participants. In this chapter the steps taken by the researcher to prepare for data gathering are described. It also discusses the diversity, political, and ethical issues of the study. This chapter also discusses the plan for implementation, data gathering, selection of participants, phases of data collection and data recording. The plan for evaluation, data analysis, the plan for termination, communicating findings to study site and participants, termination of study, and plan for follow up are also discussed.

#### Plan for Engagement

##### Research Site and Study Participants

The research site for this study was Vitas Hospice in San Bernardino. The study participants from this site are previous BSW/MSW interns who completed a one-year field placement at Vitas hospice. These participants are BSW/MSW interns who currently attend or graduated from the following universities: California State University

Long Beach, California State University San Bernardino, Loma Linda University, and La Sierra University. The study participants were ages ranged from mid-twenties to early sixties.

These universities offer a social work curriculum for both the baccalaureate and graduate education levels.

### Engagement Strategies

To locate the research site, Lorraine Hedtke (gatekeeper) was contacted. Hedtke is the bereavement manager at Vitas Hospice, and is also the intern coordinator/supervisor. After meeting with Hedtke and discussing with her the study idea, she supported and approved the research project.

To gain official support from Hedtke the researcher described the purpose of the study, motivation for the study topic and how it would benefit the agency. The researcher explained that the data collection would begin upon approval from the Institutional Review Board Committee (IRB). Hedtke expressed interest in the study topic and offered her knowledge and support.

Once the study topic received approval from the IRB, the focus was on engagement of the study participants, the interns. The BSW/MSW interns were contacted through

e-mail and telephone calls based on a contact list that the gatekeeper provided. Once the initial contact was made we set up a time for the interview. The researcher fully explained the details of the study. The researcher also offered an incentive for participating, a ten dollar gift-card, for their time.

The researcher approached the study participants, the BSW/MSW interns, with respect and flexibility. The goal was to build a positive relationship with them. The researcher explained to the interns that their role as study participants was essential to the study topic and their experience were valuable. The researcher also explained how the information that the interns shared about their experiences would be used and informed them on how to obtain the report of the findings.

The researcher explained the written consent form (Appendix B) that the BSW/MSW interns had to complete. This demonstrated their understanding of the study and their voluntary agreement to continue with the interview. The researcher also explained that she prefers to audio record the interview. This was also reflected on the informed consent.

### Self Preparation

According to Morris, "the researcher's, major task at this stage is to develop sensitivity to the focus of the inquiry, not development of correct design" (2006, p. 85). Using the post-positivist design the researcher is aware that it is important to be respectful and flexible to the interns because their experience is the main source of building theory for the study.

The researcher developed a better understanding of intern experiences by conducting a literature review.

The researcher approached the interns with a positive attitude and respect. There was a willingness and excitement to learn about the different experiences that interns have in the field.

### Diversity Issues

There were some diversity issues and those included ethnicity, culture, educational level and age. The researcher is a young, Hispanic female. The study participants were all female but do come from diverse backgrounds. Many of the participants were older than the researcher, Caucasian females who have a wide range of professional social work experience. The researcher made a conscious effort to be respectful to them and answer

any questions they might have of diversity. The researcher was able to share with the participants that she herself is a student in the MSW program and has been an intern and has an understanding of the intern experience.

### Ethical Issues

This study used the post-positivist paradigm and this paradigm deals with intense engagement so it was important to respect the confidentiality of the interns. The participants were provided with a written consent form and the researcher made sure that their identities remained confidential. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants and any questions that they had were answered. Their identities and audio-recorded interviews were kept in a secure place and destroyed after the study.

There were values that needed to be considered in this research. The values of competency require for the researcher to acknowledge that prior knowledge of this study topic was based on a literature review but also as the researcher having first hand knowledge and experience as an intern/student currently in the MSW program at California State University San Bernardino. The

researcher put all bias aside and continued to gain knowledge as the interviews were conducted. Throughout the interviews, no personal beliefs or values were imposed on the interns.

Another process that this study went through is that of human subjects review through the Institutional Review Board. The study proposal was introduced and reviewed, and the informed consent was included. The Institutional Review Board reviewed and determined that there were no problems with the study focus.

Ethical issues in this study were approached with honesty and with a humble demeanor.

#### Political Issues

The researcher consulted with Hedtke (gatekeeper), to ask about information that Vitas hospice or the interns may not agree with revealing in a public report. Hedtke informed the researcher that the agency was in full support of the research study.

The study participants were informed about the written consent form and the information that would be shared to learn about the BSW/MSW experiences at VITAS hospice. The study participants all gave permission for

their data to be shared and left it up to the researcher to use the data collected.

## Plan for Implementation

### Data Gathering

The method used to collect the data in this study was interviews. The interview questions were developed in advance. These questions can be found in Appendix A. Based on the previous literature review and the researcher's own experience as an intern she has knowledge about the population and issues studied.

The interviews were conducted in the agency or the study participant's place of employment at their request. This was done to protect the confidentiality of the study participants. The interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and the number of BSW/MSW interns interviewed was nine.

The different types of questions that were used in this study included descriptive, structural and contrast questions. "Descriptive questions are over arching questions" (Morris, 2006, p. 96). An example is, "How has being an intern at Vitas hospice affected you?" "Structured questions expand an understanding of a

specific topic" (p. 96). A structured question is, "If you have had more than one field placement, what factors motivated you to a field placement in hospice?" "Contrast questions develop criteria for inclusion and exclusion for a category of knowledge" (p. 96). These categories may be placed in groups and later labeled using open coding and axial coding. An example is, "Do you feel like you are able to apply what you learned at Vitas hospice in your current employment/placement?" This type of question will help create different categories of application to current job/placement (Morris, 2006).

#### Selection of Participants

In this study the focus was to gain an understanding about BSW/MSW experiences at their hospice field placement. The goal was to use these experiences to develop a framework/theory of the experiences of interns in their hospice field placement. To accomplish this goal a qualitative approach to data gathering and analysis was used. The sampling method utilized is criterion sampling. This technique is used in qualitative research. The reason that this technique was used is because the criteria necessary to be interviewed were that the participant was a previous BSW/MSW intern at Vitas

hospice. The number of interns was limited and therefore every intern willing to participate in this study was welcomed. The number that was interviewed is nine interns.

### Phases of Data Collection

The interview itself is a process that includes: "engagement, development of focus, maintaining focus, and termination" (Morris, 2006, p. 99). In the engagement process the researcher ensured that each participant received a written informed consent form and that it was understood and signed. The researcher also informed the participants about the audio recording and they consented and signed. These forms helped ensure that the participant's understood that this was a voluntary study and they could withdraw at any time and it also protected their privacy.

The questions in the interview were developed once the literature review was completed. After the first interview, the audio was transcribed and the researcher determined which were essential questions, extra questions, throwaway questions, and valuable questions (Morris, 2006). This was important because the researcher

determined what questions should be added and which questions should be taken out.

The termination of the interviews involved thank you letters and a ten-dollar gift card as a thank you for their time. The debriefing letter included a phone number in which they can reach the researcher's supervisor if there are questions about the study.

#### Data Recording

This study used a voice recorder. Upon completion of each interview the researcher transcribed the interview and added notes into a journal. This was a reflective process in which the researcher determined which questions were eliciting certain types of responses and which questions were redundant or not clear.

#### Plan for Evaluation

#### Data Analysis

In this study qualitative data analysis was used. The transcribed interviews were analyzed to develop codes and themes and these codes and themes were used to interpret meaning. The methods used in this process included open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding was used when words were identified and

fragments of responses were found in the interviews. These open codes developed into themes or categories and served as a guide to refine the concepts. The following process included making connections between the codes, and finding relationships in a process called axial coding. After analyzing the open codes and the axial codes, selective coding was used to build theory about the experiences of BSW/MSW interns in a hospice setting (Morris, 2006).

#### Plan for Termination

##### Communicating Findings to Study Site and Study Participants

The post positivist paradigm was used in this study and this perspective makes a commitment to report the findings to the research site and the participants. A meeting was held at Vitas hospice in San Bernardino and the staff and interns were invited to attend. In this meeting the researcher presented the study findings.

Also, upon completion and approval of the official written document it will be available to view by the study participants and the agency. The agency will also receive a copy of the document.

### Termination of Study

Termination with the agency involved reporting the study findings to the staff at Vitas. Termination with the gatekeeper involved giving her a final report. The participants were given information as to where they can find the results at the study site, Vitas hospice, or the California State University San Bernardino Library.

### Plan for Follow Up

### Ongoing Relationship with Study Participants

The researcher does not plan to keep an ongoing relationship with the study participants. The researcher does consider staying in contact with Hedtke (gatekeeper), as she is a great resource for future research endeavors. Also, the researcher considers finding employment in this field.

### Summary

This chapter discussed the engagement stage of this study. It described the steps in data gathering. It also discussed the diversity, political, and ethical issues related to this study. It also discussed the plan for implementation, data gathering, selection of participants, phases of data collection and data

recording, the plan for evaluation and data analysis, the plan for termination, communicating findings to study site and participants, termination of study, and plan for follow up.

## CHAPTER THREE

### IMPLEMENTATION

#### Introduction

Chapter Three discusses the selection of the study participants. Criterion sampling strategies were used to gain access to the participants. Also, the data gathering phases, techniques, and questions used in the interviews are also discussed.

#### Research Site and Study Participants

The research site for this study was Vitas Innovative Hospice in San Bernardino. The study participants were previous BSW/MSW interns who completed a one-year field placement at Vitas hospice under the direct supervision of Lorraine Hedtke (Intern Field Instructor/Bereavement Manager).

These participants are BSW/MSW interns who currently attend or graduated from the following universities: California State University Long Beach, California State University San Bernardino, Loma Linda University, and La Sierra University.

The study participants' ages ranged from mid-twenties to early sixties. Their ethnicities included

Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, and one participant identified herself as other.

#### Selection of Participants

In this study the focus was to generate theoretical statements about BSW/MSW intern experiences based on the participants responses to the interviews. Qualitative approaches to data gathering and analysis were used to accomplish this. The method of sampling that was used was, criterion sampling. "Criterion sampling is based on a particular characteristic of the population that is included in the study" (Morris, 2006, 93). In this case the criterion was that the potential population for the study had to be a previous BSW/MSW intern that had completed a field placement at VITAS under the supervision of Lorraine Hedtke.

The researcher gained the data for the study, by selecting a group of previous BSW/MSW interns from Vitas hospice to share their stories. Since these participants were previous interns, they would be aware of the Vitas hospice social work intern experience.

The study participants included nine females, some of which already graduated from their respective MSW

program. During the interview they were asked questions about their experience as interns. The questions were designed to elicit the interns to share about their personal experiences as interns while at Vita's hospice. The questions included the following areas: familiarity with hospice, motivation, acceptance in the team, connecting field with theory, applying skills, learning environment, relationship with field instructor, and the overall evaluation of VITAS as a field placement.

The following chart exhibits the demographic background from the nine female interns interviewed in this study.

Table 1. Demographics

Variables (N=9)	Percentage (%)
<b>Ethnicity:</b>	
Caucasian (4)	44.4
African-American (1)	11.1
Hispanic (3)	33.3
Other (1)	11.1
<b>Age:</b>	
20-30 (4)	44.4
31-40 (1)	11.1
42-50 (3)	33.3
51-65 (1)	11.1
<b>School:</b>	
California State University, Long Beach (1)	11.1
California State University, San Bernardino (2)	22.2
Loma Linda University (5)	55.5
La Sierra University (1)	11.1
<b>Education:</b>	
MSW/LCSW (1)	11.1
MSW (4)	44.4
MSW/MS Gerontology (2)	22.2
MSW/MA Criminal Justice (1)	11.1
BSW (1)	11.1

#### Data Gathering

The qualitative data gathering method used in this study was interviewing. The questions were developed in advance, "since this ensures that all interviewees will experience the same or similar interview and common patterns regarding similar research foci will be addressed" (Morris, 2006, 95). The questions used in this

study can be found in Appendix A. A level of knowledge was accomplished before the interviews through the research conducted on intern experiences in field placement. The researcher also spoke to the gatekeeper (Lorraine Hedtke) and found it to be helpful and supportive.

The researcher used a variety of questions including descriptive, structural and contrast questions. A descriptive question used was, "How has being an intern at Vitas helped you in your current field placement or employment?". A structured question that used was, "If you were or were not familiar with hospice what motivated to choose VITAS as a field placement?". A contrast question used was, "Do you feel that you accomplished everything you set out to learn in your internship at Vitas?". This question helped create the category of, "learning goals" as defined by the interns (Morris, 2006).

#### Phases of Data Collection

The interview includes the following stages: engagement, development of focus, maintaining focus, and termination. The engagement step occurred before the

interview was conducted. During the engagement process the researcher ensured that a written informed consent form was understood and signed. The audio informed consent form was also explained and signed by the interns. These forms ensured that the interns' had the right to refuse to continue with the study, ensure that their privacy was respected, and ensure that no harm came from participating in this study. To engage the participants the researcher used initial phone calls prior to the interviews to describe the study focus. The interns were also encouraged to choose the time and place where they wanted the interview to take place. Some of the interns chose to meet at Vitas hospice and others chose to meet at their place of employment. The focus was on making the participants feel at ease with the whole process. The researcher maintained a high level of flexibility and respect towards the interns' availability. The interview questions were also flexible in that they included essential questions, extra questions, throwaway questions, and probing questions. There were some questions that were essential in addressing the specific research topic. An essential question used was, "How has being a hospice intern

affected your current internship/employment?". Other questions were asked as extra questions after the interview saw a need to expand further on the essential questions. For example, "How has your current internship/employment benefited from the knowledge you gained at Vitas?". There were also throwaway questions that were used to develop rapport with the interns. One example was, "What is your ethnicity, age, degree?". These types of questions were not specifically relevant to the study focus but it allowed the interviewees and the researcher to share background information at the beginning of the interview and elicited conversation to help develop the relationship further. This was important because the researcher was a stranger and this allowed for the interns and researcher to get to know each other better to enhance the rest of the interview where more detail questions about their opinions and experiences would be shared.

At the end of the interview, the termination stage, the researcher encouraged the interns to share feedback on the interview, or ask any questions they may have had about the interview. Many interns took the opportunity to share the questions they found to be important and they

added recommendations they had for other interns thinking about hospice social work. The interns were provided with a, "Thank You" card and a \$10 dollar gift-card. They were also provided with the debriefing statement that provided a phone number and the name of the researcher's advisor, Dr. McCaslin, if they had any further questions.

### Data Recording

The researcher used a voice recorder during the interview. This was helpful because the researcher focused entirely on the interviewee and their responses. After each interview the researcher transcribed the data and made notes about what could be improved for the next interview. This was an important aspect of the data recording process because the researcher was able to detect, which questions were not clear or confusing, and which questions were developing into themes and categories. The researcher then developed a journal that had all of the transcribed interviews and informed consents in it.

### Summary

Chapter Three explained the process of choosing the participants for this study. It also explained the data

gathering process and described the questions that were utilized during the interview. The phases of data collection were described and the methods used to collect the data audio, transcriptions, journal, were discussed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EVALUATION

#### Introduction

Chapter Four reports and interprets the findings of this study. The data analysis section explains the methods that were utilized to analyze and interpret the data that was collected. The methods used include open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The data was interpreted to build the theory about BSW/MSW interns' experiences in hospice social work at Vitas hospice. The theory that was developed will be discussed and also included are the implications it has on micro/macro social work practice. Finally, the study limitations will be discussed.

#### Data Analysis

This study used post positivist qualitative data analysis. Open coding was used to identify words and responses with differences and similarities. The researcher used these open codes to create categories and concepts to merge them into themes. Connections between these codes were made and linked using axial coding: During axial coding the researcher found similarities in

the data. Selective coding was then used to bring together the categories and concepts, to develop the theory about the experience of interns in a hospice social work field placement (Morris, 2006).

#### Open Coding and Axial Coding

Once the nine interviews were transcribed the researcher began to analyze the data and identified 16 themes (axial codes). The words within the themes are the open codes. The sixteen themes were: previous knowledge of hospice, motivation for choosing hospice as field placement, expectations, training, learning activities, connections with theory and practice, application, what they learned from patients, working as part of the interdisciplinary team, field instructor, what was most helpful, what was least helpful, learning goals, likelihood of working for hospice after completion of field placement, overall evaluation, and recommendations to other students.

The open codes that emerged from these themes were:

Previous Knowledge of Hospice. (Work experience, personal/loved ones, no knowledge). This code refers to any previous knowledge the interns had before accepting their field placement at VITAS Hospice. While some

interns were familiar with hospice on a personal level others expressed being surprised by what they learned and one interviewee expressed that she was not really excited about hospice.

Motivation for Choosing Hospice as Field Placement.

(Employment opportunities in gerontology/medical social work, didn't want hospice). This code expresses the interviewees' motivation for choosing VITAS Hospice as their field placement. For some interns it was a clear decision but others reported that initially it was not the experience they thought they were looking for.

Expectations. (Learn about death/dying, work with gerontology population, clinical skills, great supervision, none). This code refers to the expectations that the interns had of their field placement. Many interns expressed that they expected to work with older adults and death and dying. Other interns expressed that they did not know what to expect initially.

Training. (Computers, shadowing, readings, volunteer orientation). This code refers to the initial intern orientation at Vitas, the training they received including shadowing, computers and integration to team.

Learning Activities. (Shadowing, caseload, visits, bereavement calls, documentation, routine visits, initial assessments, event planning, IDG meetings, workshops, co-facilitate groups). This code was developed to express the daily activities and responsibilities of the interns. This code expresses what a "typical" day for an intern was like while at Vitas Hospice. It includes learning activities such as caseload, calls, visiting patients, shadowing, paperwork, and other learning activities.

Connections with Theory and Practice. (None, narrative therapy, professionalism, clinical skills). This code was created to express the interns ability to make connections with what they were learning in the classroom, theory, and with what they were learning in their field placement. Most of the interviewees expressed that they felt they learned more about theory, specifically narrative theory, in the field placement than what they learned in the classroom.

Application to Current Employment/Internship. (Narrative therapy in gerontology, mental health, emergency room, juvenile jail). This code was created to express how the interns were able or not able to apply what they learned at Vitas hospice in their current place

of employment and at their current internships. All of the interviewees reported that they are able to apply the skills and theory learned in their employment and internship and many of them actually stayed at Vitas or are working in other hospices.

What they Learned from Patients. (Strength, unique ways of viewing death, listening to stories, appreciate life, it is okay to talk about death/dying, courage, empowerment). This code was created to express what the interns learned from working with the patients.

Working as Part of the Interdisciplinary Team. (Support, different disciplines, different perspectives, suggestions). This code was developed because the interns expressed what they learned from the staff at Vitas. In hospice they were exposed to different disciplines and they were part of the interdisciplinary team.

Field Instructor. (Narrative therapy, trust self, know self, how to guide conversations, to questions, think outside the box, engage, be fully present, challenge traditional ways of viewing death, communication, people skills). This code was created because the interns expressed what they learned and valued from their relationship with their field

instructor, Lorraine Hedtke. All the interviewees shared how much they learned about narrative therapy. They also expressed how Lorraine goes above and beyond her duties as field instructor and how her teachings have impacted them.

What was Most Helpful. (Working with interdisciplinary team, time spent with patients/families, bereavement counseling, hands-on shadowing, staff). This code was developed to express what the interns found to be most helpful in their experience at Vitas.

What was Least Helpful. (Computer training, not enough shadowing for students who worked weekends, making bereavement calls in big table with lots of noise, driving, unpredictable schedule). This code was developed to express what the interns found to be the least helpful in their experience as interns at Vitas.

Learning Goals. (More than expected, narrative theory, co-facilitate bereavement groups, clinical skills, empowerment). This code was developed as the interns expressed if they accomplished everything they set out to learn.

Likelihood of Working for Hospice after Completion of Field Placement. (High because of supervision, staff, company reputation in the community). This code was created as some interns expressed they gained employment or plan to gain employment in hospice after graduation because of their positive field placement experience at Vitas hospice.

Overall Evaluation. (Great, many opportunities, great staff support, supervision excellent, support students, encourage education). This code was developed as the interns expressed their overall evaluation of their field placement at Vitas.

Recommendations to Other Students. (Death/dying, bring it back to classroom, narrative theory comes to life, learn about self, challenge own views of death/dying, diversity, student goes through bereavement group/powerful experience). This code was developed as the interns expressed how they would recommend this field placement to other students.

#### Selective Coding

The data analysis was accomplished by using open coding to determine the common themes and categories

within the data. The open codes helped to define the commonalities and make connections among the codes, through the use of axial coding.

"Selective coding is the process of integrating and refining the categories and their dimensions to develop theory" (Morris, 2006, p. 116). The process of selective coding helped to discover the theory about the intern experience. To analyze the story that began to develop, a selective coding chart (Figure 1) was helpful in creating a visual image of the commonalities and differences found within the data. The discoveries identified are the theory of the BSW/MSW intern experience at Vitas hospice.

The theory discovered during data analysis was, that BSW/MSW interns at Vitas hospice share similar experiences before their field placement, during their field placement and after field placement. This experience revealed common overall evaluation and recommendations from the interns. The chart above displays this common experience, before field placement, during field placement, after field placement and overall evaluation/recommendations. Following are also the themes that were created based on the interns' responses.

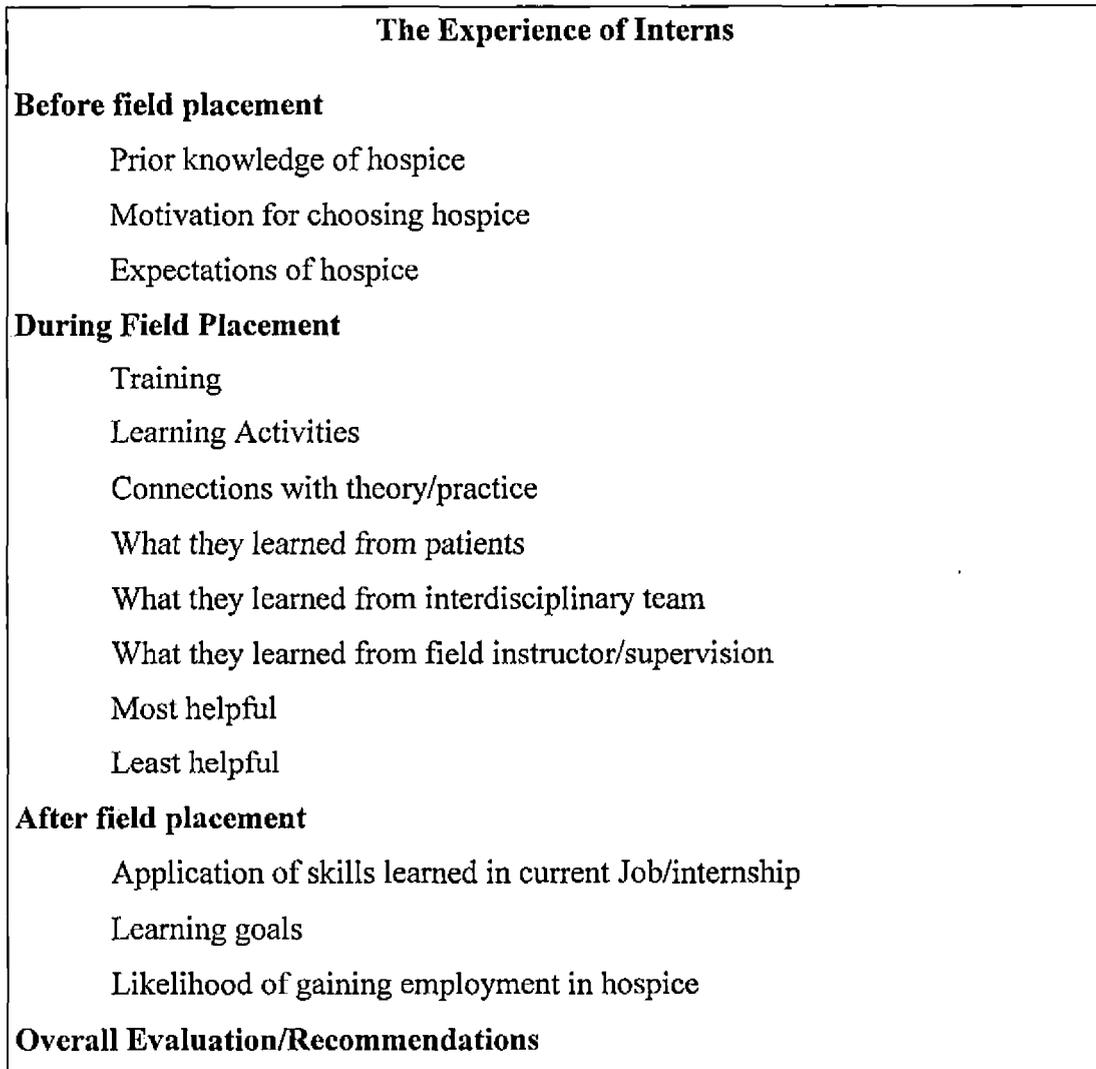


Figure 1. Experience of Interns

Before Field Placement

Interns go through common experiences before their field placement, which are defined by the themes, "prior knowledge of hospice," "motivation for choosing hospice" and "expectations of hospice."

In relation to the interns' prior knowledge, it was found that most of the interns interviewed had work experience in gerontology, personal experience with a loved one in hospice and the rest had no previous knowledge of hospice.

For example, interviewee 1 shared that she had this idea "that hospice was helping people to die and just be there with them to provide emotional and medical support." Interviewee 2 shared that she "had an elderly aunt that went into hospice care prior to her death." Interviewee 4 added, she "had no idea what hospice was besides working with older people."

Many of them reported that their motivation for choosing hospice as a field placement was due to hospice being the closest thing to medical social work, or wanting to work in gerontology but most reported that they had no motivation for going into hospice. For some, it was the only choice offered by their school.

For example, interviewee 1 said, "I wanted to go to hospice because I have always worked with seniors." Interviewee 5 shared that she "wanted to go into medical social work and was advised that hospice was a good match." Interviewee 7 said, "I didn't have a choice."

The researcher discovered that for some of the interns their motivation for choosing hospice was low and therefore they reported not having significant expectations of the field placement.

Interviewee 4 reported, "I didn't really know what to expect, I was kind of really nervous because I came in with the idea that I didn't like older people."

For those interns that had a higher motivation for choosing hospice their expectations were that they would learn about death and dying, clinical skills, work with seniors, learn the medical model and have great supervision. The interns that expected great supervision had heard about Lorraine and for some it was the reason why they were motivated to choose Vitas hospice as a field placement.

For example, Interviewee 1 reported, "I expected to work with seniors and help them with the dying process." Interviewee 7 reported, "I expected to learn more clinical skills like more therapy beyond the basic of what we learn in school." Interviewee 8 reported, "I was expecting something very close to a medical model." Interviewee 9 reported, "I expected to have really good supervision. I had heard that Lorraine provides great

supervision. I was expecting that I would be trained up and equipped to then go out and work."

#### During Field Placement

During the field placement the themes that emerged were related to "training," "learning activities," "connections with theory/practice," "what they learned from patients," "what they learned from interdisciplinary team," "what they learned from field instructor/supervision," what was "most helpful" and "least helpful."

In their initial training at Vitas the interns received computer training, volunteer orientation, shadowing, readings, and supervision. Most of the interns shared that the initial training was helpful but agreed that some things were more helpful than others. For example, they shared that the shadowing was excellent but the computer training was too long. They shared that they felt welcomed as part of the staff and that made the transition smooth.

Interviewee 4 shared her thoughts about computer training "The computer training lasted 12 weeks and I thought it was ridiculously too long." Interviewee 7 shared that "the one day volunteer training was great. It

taught us the background safety issues and that was important because we were going into client's homes and you need to be aware of your surroundings."

As part of their learning activities the interns reported that they shadowed different team members (nurses, chaplains, home health aide), they conducted home visits, provided bereavement calls, initial psycho-social assessments, co-facilitated groups, led workshops, planned community events, conducted routine visits and prepared documentation. This theme was also related to their overall evaluation of the field as they felt they gained many diverse experiences. It also demonstrates how their initial expectations were exceeded by the field placement.

Interviewee 1 shared her experience. "I did shadow and it was neat to see them work. One social worker was so loving and so caring with the patient. She touched her, massaged her hand, she sang to her and I thought wow." Interviewee 2 shared, "I did a lot of telephone work where I would call the patients to find out if they had everything they needed. I would also provide emotional support and anticipatory grief counseling with family members validating caregivers about the difficulty

of their situation." Interviewee 9 shared, "As an intern I led a compassion fatigue workshop for the staff. There were other macro projects outside of just going out and seeing patients."

Many of the interns reported that they struggled with making connections with theory in the classroom and practice. They all shared that they felt they learned more in the field than they learned in school. They were introduced to narrative therapy, which they were not learning in school at that time. They appreciated learning narrative theory, as they were able to engage their peers and bring something new to the classroom.

Interviewee 1 shared, "in terms of theory it was the narrative therapy that I learned with Lorraine that I was able to practice with patients and that I still use with creating stories with people." Interviewee 7 shared, "I got more in the internship working with Lorraine and narrative therapy. Trying to tie that in the classroom and bringing that back it was an interesting challenge because some of my peers didn't understand narrative concepts. Some people opened to it and did get exposed to narrative therapy through me."

The interns shared that they learned strength from their patients, to appreciate life, pay attention to life, listening to stories, guiding conversations, courage, dying gracefully, and that it is okay to talk about death and dying. Working with the patients allowed them to experience diversity in the unique ways that patients approach death. They also shared that they learned more about themselves and their own views of death and dying were challenged.

Interviewee 2 shared that she learned that, "every one is unique and approaches life and the end of life in their own way." Interviewee 3 shared what she learned. "I wasn't really appreciating life and to be able to spend time with my patients and to realize that they are in their last days and to see how happy they were with their families, that was the most important thing for me to realize that it's what you make it." Interviewee 6 shared, "I learned to pay attention in life working with the clients who have such a sharp focus of what they want because if you have six months to live how do you want to spend it, what does that look that to you? And also courage and the importance of being present." Interviewee 7 shared, "They taught me that it's okay to talk about

death and dying." Interviewee 9 shared, "They taught me that life is precious and about dying gracefully with courage. I learned about the characteristics and qualities of being a human that are important."

The interns also shared the valuable ways in which they were exposed to the interdisciplinary team. They felt they received support from the staff, they learned about different perspectives from the different disciplines (nurses, physician, chaplain, home health aide, volunteers), they learned how a hospice team works together for the benefit of the patient, and they shared that they appreciated the staff for appreciating them.

Interviewee 3 shared, "the nurses had such a special connection with the family and patients. The nurses showed much compassion. They were able to help the patients through this experience. The chaplains, I remember one in particular, talked about crying. He said that tears are the words that we cannot express. So the words that won't come to mind so this is how we talk by crying." Interviewee 6 shared, "From the team, I learned about the value of everybody coming to the table together with something important whether you're a clinician, chaplain, or a nurse. I often found that the people with

some of the most in depth information were the home health aides. They were the ones that helped the clients with feeding, baths and they were there all the time and they had a different relationship because of it. I learned to value everyone."

From their field instructor they expressed they got something above and beyond what they expected. Many of the interns reported that their supervision was excellent and they were so satisfied that they would consider working for Vitas because of the supervisory relationship they had with the field instructor. They all shared that they learned narrative therapy and it was such a great experience that they are now able to apply it to their current jobs and field placement. They learned how to be fully present and engaged. They learned professionalism and to think outside the box. Out of all the themes and open codes this one was the most unifying. Every intern shared delight and appreciation when they spoke about their supervision and field placement instructor. They felt that she cared about them as people and she put all her efforts into teaching them the things that are important when working with the dying, bereaved, and their families.

For example, interviewee 1 shared, "I learned a lot about myself. Lorraine always told me that I had voices of uncertainty and doubt. She would say, there is your voice of doubt. When I start doubting myself, I remember Lorraine would help me acknowledge the doubt voices and I learned to work around them. I really do have the skills and techniques."

Interviewee 2 shared, "she has a different approach than most textbook theory ways of doing things. Narrative is mostly her way of approaching a problem. It's not just letting people talk but to guide a conversation and help a person find the resolution within themselves."

Interviewee 3 shared, "she taught me to question. Just because something is done a certain way it doesn't mean it has to be done that way." Interviewee 4 shared, "She pulled things out of you that you didn't think would come out and made you look at things in a different way by the questions that she was able to ask." Interviewee 5 shared, "it's very hard to put it in words the training that she gave us. I think that she gave us of herself and she's very intellectual and knowledgeable." Interviewee 6 shared, "She taught me to look at grief in a whole different way. Not the old school Kubler-Ross kind of way

but totally stepped back and looked at it using narrative therapy. It was a whole paradigm shift for me.”

Interviewee 7 shared, “She really helped bring attention to what I was feeling really insecure about and having problems with kind of reframing how that’s going to work for me and how is that going to make me be able to help other type of people that may get overlooked.”

Interviewee 8 shared, “I want to be like her. She also taught me the narrative perspective because I didn’t know anything about it.” Interviewee 9 shared, “I learned professionalism. I learned skills to work with bereaved. That’s one of the biggest gifts Lorraine has given me. The ability to help people relate to their loved ones after death and using narrative therapy with this population.”

The things that the interns found to be most helpful were the interdisciplinary team meetings, supervision, shadowing, flexibility, and the time allowed to spend with patients.

Interviewee 6 said, “The most helpful was the amount of time I got to spend with clients in their home and working with them in a very personal and intimate time in their lives.” Interviewee 8 said, “The fact that the

internship placement is actually caring about the interns is helpful. They are genuinely invested in our learning. They are not just using us as staff for them to cut corners in their budgeting but they were really interested in us learning the proper assessment techniques or documentation process. It was warm in that sense." Interviewee 9 said, "It was the hands-on shadowing. That was the most helpful, having many people there to help me. People were available so the availability and that they were dependable."

The things that the interns found were the least helpful were the computer training, not enough shadowing for those students who worked on the weekends, making bereavement calls in the big table where there was too much noise and distraction, driving, and the structure of not knowing what to expect sometimes.

Interviewee 1 said, "The computers got in my way. I stressed about not doing the paperwork right. Also, I didn't get to shadow a lot and I thought I lost a little bit." Interviewee 6 said, "One thing I didn't like was making bereavement calls at a table in the back of a room. But the social workers didn't have a room of their own and I felt really awkward making these bereavement

calls with all the background noise. That was terrible. That's one thing I would really change." Interviewee 8 said, "The documentation part felt like it lasted forever. The computer training was long and boring." Interviewee 9 said, "We had to go to the computer classes for a month or two and that wasn't that helpful because I didn't learn well just trying to learn on the computer. I needed to be out doing a visit."

#### After Field Placement

In "after field placement" the following themes were included: "application of skills learned to current job/internship," "learning goals," and "likelihood of gaining employment in hospice after field placement."

All of the interns shared that they are able to apply what they learned at Vitas to their current place of employment and internship. Although some of the interns are currently employed in the mental health field and medical social work they reported that the narrative skills that they learned at Vitas they continue to use.

Interviewee 7 said, "I have helped my coworkers because it is such a different view that I got at Vitas and it is not mainstream and that's important because not all of our patients and our clients are mainstream. They

don't all fit into what we like to view as grief. I like to try to put some of these concepts in other people's minds so that they don't pigeon hole our patients because that's not good service and that's not fair to them."

Interviewee 4 said, "I work with juveniles who are locked up. A lot of them have very traumatic experiences. My ability to use the narrative therapy helps me and them to pull out their experiences and be able to talk about issues a little bit easier than just asking them a straight question. It was a lot easier to be able to connect with people." Interviewee 5 said, "Definitely, because of my internship at Vitas I decided to continue in hospice care. It helped to get my job that I'm working at now as a hospice social worker. I think that was the foundation and the door opener." Interviewee 9, "I work here at Vitas now and everything I did helps me now in my job."

All of the interns also reported that they accomplished all of their learning goals and even learned more than what they first had expected. The interns learned narrative therapy, clinical skills, empowerment, and co-facilitated bereavement groups.

Interviewee 1 shared, "Actually, I did more. I didn't think I was going to do a group. I ended up co-facilitating groups so I accomplished more than what my goals were." Interviewee 4 said, "I learned everything that I didn't think that I would learn. I learned more than I ever expected, by far. Honestly, it wasn't until this year's internship that I realized how much I did learn. Being able to use what I learned last year really shows me how much I did learn and what a great supervisor Lorraine was and what a good placement this was."

Four of the interns interviewed currently are employed in hospice and the three interns that are still in school reported that they are contemplating going into hospice after graduation. This was interesting because many of them initially did not have any motivation for choosing hospice as a field placement but after their experience at Vitas they gained employment in hospice and are contemplating working in hospice. This shows that their satisfaction with their field placement experience has played a significant role in the way they view hospice now. Whereas it was once an unknown territory it is now a place where they could see themselves practice as professional social workers.

Interviewee 2 shared, "I got invited to come and work at VITAS as an intern. After I finished my MSW they offered me a per-diem on-call work for weekends."

Interviewee 4 shared, "I liked it so much here that I'm honestly contemplating on doing this after I'm done with grad school. Lorraine is amazing so I don't know if Vitas without Lorraine would be the same thing. For a company to really stand strong you have to have a supervisor and a team leader who is willing to step out on the line for their employees and that's what Lorraine does."

Interviewee 5 shared, "After Vitas I gained employment in another hospice and where I'm working there is another intern that was with us at Vitas and she just got hired there recently so we have developed a very close relationship because of our internship." Interviewee 8 said, "Hospice is fulfilling. I would consider working for hospice." Interviewee 9 said, "I work at Vitas now and everything I did during field placement helps me now in my job."

#### Overall Evaluation/Recommendations

The interns participated in the "overall evaluation" and "recommendations to other students."

The interns were provided with the opportunity to share their overall evaluation of the Vitas field placement experience.

Almost all of the interns shared that their experience was great and they rated Vitas hospice very highly as a field placement. They said that Vitas offers many opportunities to encounter different aspects of the social work profession. They reported that the staff was excellent and supported students' learning and encouraged education. The supervision was excellent. They said that Vitas is a great agency with a high reputation in the community they serve and they would recommend it to other students and even refer their own patients.

Interviewee 2 said, "It offers a lot of opportunities for the students whether they are BSW/MSW, or PhD. This particular type of medical social work you encounter every type of social work there is. I had an APS case and a CPS case and both of those were the patient. We provide community resources, not just for housing and food and legal stuff but all the things that social workers get involved in." Interviewee 3 said, "I can definitely see that it's not for everybody. You have to have a certain personality to be there to understand

to deal with death and dying and not everyone can do that. I think about just every one of the social workers in the E.R. where I work has been involved with hospice at some point or another because it's just a really good placement and experience. Vitas has a good reputation in the community as a hospice agency. It's a good company to be associated with." Interviewee 5 said, "I think Vitas is a great place because they support students. They encourage education, and there are not many places that are willing to do that." Interviewee 9 said, "I think that if my year of internship was not what it was I would obviously not be an employee now. I loved supervision. One of the things they are responsible for is seeing the things that we don't see in ourselves and that we need someone to say you have these gifts. Lorraine believed in me that I could put on that workshop and speak in front of all those people and that's part of what helps others succeed and that's one of the biggest things Lorraine and Vitas has done for me."

The interns were provided with the opportunity to share what recommendations they would share with other future students in field. Most of the interns shared that every student needs to learn about death and dying no

matter what field you delve into and Vitas is the best place to learn about death and dying. You learn about narrative therapy and the field instructor brings the narrative theory to life. This is a field placement that will challenge you and you will learn about yourself and where you are with death and dying. The interns said that you will bring the things you learn back into the classroom and you will have excellent supervision. You will also overcome any fears of death and dying. You will learn to work as part of an interdisciplinary team and learn the value of diversity.

Interviewee 1 said, "I would recommend it to other students who want to learn about death and dying. I would recommend it to everybody and more so because of the instruction that I got. I learned about death and dying, anticipatory grief, different ways to express grief, the length of time people grieve, everybody experiences grief differently; it could take a year, a month." Interviewee 2 said, "This internship stretches a student and brings the theory to life." Interviewee 3 said, "I would ask students to examine their own thought about death and dying. One of the things we had to do as hospice interns was go through a bereavement class. It was all interns

that were in the class but still there were a lot of tears as people were processing regrets. Not having done something or missed opportunities. Each person, in going into hospice, needs to know where he or she is with death and dying. Where they are with control because we are facilitators of the dying patient." Interviewee 4 said, "Jump in whole-heartedly and be optimistic and take every experience for what it is because it really will make a difference in your education and your ability to work with a different population that you're not used to." Interviewee 5 said, "I recommend Vitas not only as a field placement but as a business." Interviewee 7 said, "I would encourage interns to not be resistant or opposed to some of the things that Lorraine may say if you're working with Lorraine. When I think of my Vitas experience I really do think of Lorraine. It's kind of hard to separate it in terms of how was VITAS without Lorraine because I don't know if I would have gotten the same experience. I feel I got that richness because I learned that patients and families can accept death but what does that mean for them and how will that change things for them and how do they see life afterwards. Some people they have life after death and you can evoke those

conversations rather than that this is the end and you have to say goodbye." Interviewee 9 said, "I would recommend this placement to anyone. It will get you outside your comfort zone and it will help you overcome any fear of death and dying and all the feelings revolved around that. When you go to an internship here you have to pursue, endure, and do everything you can to make the best of your experience. Let the supervisors and people know what it is you want and need. Communicate your goals so that they can help you meet them."

#### Implications of Findings for Micro and Macro Practice

From a micro social work perspective, this study may have contributed to social workers developing effective field placement opportunities for interns and stronger supervisory relationships with the social work students in the field. This study provides an insight on what it is like to be an intern. Social work students in the field can learn from the before, during, after field placement experience that interns may have and from their evaluation and recommendations. This feedback is positive for the interactions between social workers and social work interns.

In the before field placement experience that interns have, previous knowledge about hospice and expectations that the interns reported, are areas that social workers in the field have experience in. This study could teach social workers how to outreach to students by providing more information about hospice to interns, before the field placement experience. Social workers who provide supervision for interns, can work with them to provide education and help them to develop some knowledge about hospice.

During the field placement period, social workers who supervise interns can use the evaluations and recommendations provided by the interns to work more effectively and in collaboration to promote a successful learning environment for the intern, supervisor, and other staff in the agency.

From a macro perspective, field placement opportunities can be developed to better meet the needs of interns. It would be beneficial in providing a successful field placement experience. Social work practice can emphasize the development of internship programs, to teach the interns about the field placement experience in general.

Also, it would be necessary to provide education for field instructors. Field instructors need to be aware and conscious of students needs while managing the needs of the agency. The universities need to work in collaboration with the agency, field instructor, and student to develop the best internship experience that will meet the needs of all.

This study is also beneficial in it's qualitative nature. The literature review revealed that most studies that have been conducted in this area are quantitative. This study explores the needs of more research opportunities that should be developed to further expand the knowledge on the needs of students in field placement.

#### Limitations of Study

There were a series of limitations associated with this study. The first limitation was related to the sample size, which was nine female interns. It would be beneficial for future studies to increase the study sample size, to develop a broader understanding of the experience of interns in field placement not only in hospice but also in every other field placement.

Another limitation of the study is that all the interns were female so this experience was from a female perspective. It would be interesting to interview male interns to learn about their experience as interns and if they differ from their female peers.

For future studies, it is also suggested that the researcher spend more time analyzing the data. Further research is suggested.

#### Summary

Chapter Four unveiled the data analysis section of this study. The data from the interns' interviews were used to develop codes, which in turn developed into themes, which built the theory of the experience of BSW/MSW interns at Vitas hospice. The researcher discovered the unifying social phenomenon, before field placement, during field placement, after field placement, and overall evaluation/recommendations. These experiences and stories that the interns shared had commonalities. This chapter also explored the different ways that micro and macro social work practice can be impacted by this study. Finally, this chapter also discussed the limitations discovered upon completion of this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TERMINATION AND FOLLOW UP

#### Introduction

Chapter Five discusses the termination process that was part of this study. This chapter describes the communication method used to share the study findings to Vitas hospice and the study participants. The methods used in termination with the participants from a post positivist perspective were also discussed.

#### Communicating Findings to Study Site and Study Participants

This study was conducted from a post positivist perspective. This perspective makes a commitment to report study findings back to the site and to the participants.

The study findings were presented in a monthly staff meeting at Vitas hospice in San Bernardino. The staff and participants were invited to this meeting. The team members invited were from the interdisciplinary team at Vitas who have had the opportunity to work and train some of the interns. The presentation included the introduction of the study focus and theory discovered.

This presentation included a poster that represented the study focus and the demographics of the study.

The poster was also presented at California State University, San Bernardino during, poster day. The interns and the Hedtke (gatekeeper) were invited to attend this event.

The study findings were also typed into an official document. On approval, this document will be located in the John M. Pfau library at California State University, San Bernardino. A copy of the study was also presented to Hedtke and Vitas hospice, as appreciation for their support in the study and as a means for the interns to view the results of the study.

#### Termination of Study

Termination for this study involved reporting the research findings to colleagues in the MSW program and to the research site. To terminate the relationship with Vitas hospice, the researcher presented the findings at the agency and also gave Hedtke (gatekeeper) a copy of the final project.

The study participants were invited to the staff meeting and poster day to report the research findings to

them and to thank them for their cooperation and contribution to the study.

#### Ongoing Relationship with Study Participants

At this time the researcher does not plan for an ongoing relationship with the study participants. However the researcher does consider seeking employment in the future working as a supervisor/field instructor with BSW/MSW interns.

#### Summary

Chapter Five discussed the researcher's method of termination with the study site, the study participants, and the gatekeeper. This was a valuable experience. Making connections with the hospice agency and interns experiences

APPENDIX A  
DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

## DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

Introduction Questions: These questions will serve the purpose of engaging the study participant.

### Introduction/Background Questions

1. What is your ethnicity?
2. What is your educational background?
3. What is your age?
4. What is your school affiliation?
5. Are you employed, in what field?
6. What were your previous/current field placements?

### Transition Questions

7. Before becoming an intern at VITAS were you familiar with hospice?
8. What motivated you to choose VITAS as a field placement?
9. What did you expect, want, or felt you needed in a field placement?
10. What was your initial training ("orientation") at VITAS like?
11. In what ways was it helpful?
12. Did you get to observe other staff in the field? What was that like?
13. Did you feel welcomed and that you were a part of staff/team in the agency?
14. Can you describe a typical day for you as an intern at VITAS?
15. Were you able to make connections with your field experience, theory and what you were learning in the classroom?
16. In your current employment/internship are you able to use and apply what you learned at VITAS?
17. What would you say is the most important thing you learned from working with the patients?

18. What is the most important thing that you learned from working with the staff members?
19. What did you learn from your field instructor?
20. What would you say was the most helpful in your experience?
21. What was the least helpful?
22. Did you accomplish everything that you set out to learn?

#### Closing Questions

23. Overall, how would you evaluate VITAS as a field placement?
24. Would you recommend it to other students?
25. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT

## INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate MSW intern experiences. This study is being conducted by Martha Romero under supervision of Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, Professor at California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

In this study you will be asked to participate in an interview that will ask you a series of questions about your experiences. With your permission, this interview will be audio recorded. Once the study is complete, the audio recording of the interview will be destroyed. The interview will take about 30 to 45 minutes to complete. All of your responses will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researcher. Your name will not be reported with your responses. The study will remain confidential and your name will not be connected to your responses. The interview process will take place at the agency in an office area, in order to ensure the privacy of your responses. There are no foreseeable risks of participation in this study. You may receive the group results of this study upon completion on September, 2009 at your agency.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary. You are free not to answer any questions and withdraw at any time during this study. If you make the choice to discontinue participation in this study, your relationship with your agency will not be jeopardized. When you have completed the interview, you will receive a statement describing the study in more detail. Participation in this study will contribute to social work research. Your responses will help create a better understanding of the issue of the experiences that interns have in field placement, which will benefit social work professionals in working with interns.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Rosemary McCaslin at 909-537-5507.

By placing a check mark in the box below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

Place a check mark here \_\_\_\_\_ Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

## **DEBRIEFING STATEMENT**

This study you have just completed was designed to investigate your experience as a BSW/MSW intern. In this study you were interviewed about your intern experiences while completing your field placement at VITAS hospice. The investigator will report your responses during the interview, and your name will not be revealed.

Thank you for your participation in this study. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Professor Rosemary McCaslin at 909-537-5507. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please refer to the California State University, San Bernardino, John M. Pfau Library after September 2009.

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