

Board of examiners

Prof. dr. Sofie Verhaeghe

Department of Public Health
Universiteit Gent

Prof. dr. Bernadette Dierckx de Casterlé

Academic Centre for Nursing and Midwifery
Department of Public Health and Primary Care, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

Prof. dr. Gerrit Loots

Faculty of Psychology & Educational Sciences
Department of Clinical and Lifespan Psychology, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Prof. dr. Nele Adriaenssens

Oncology Department of UZ Brussels
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Dr. Bert Van Puyenbroeck

Faculty of Psychology & Educational Sciences
Department of Clinical and Lifespan Psychology, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Prof. dr. Mark Leys, Chair

Department of Public Health
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Prof. dr. Johan Bilsen, Promoter

Department of Public Health
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Prof. dr. Paul Enzlin, Co-promoter

Interfaculty Institute for Family and Sexuality Studies,
Department of Neurosciences, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

Prof. dr. Lieve Peremans, Co-promoter

Department of nursing and midwifery sciences,
Department of General Practice, Universiteit Antwerpen



PhD in Social Health Sciences
2017-2018

INVITATION to the Public defence of

Charlotte Benoot

To obtain the academic degree of '**DOCTOR IN SOCIAL HEALTH SCIENCES**'

**Sexuality and intimacy during terminal illness:
a qualitative multi-method study of the experiences of patients
and partners, and the role of palliative care nurses.**

Thursday 30 August 2018

Auditorium **Piet Brouwer**, 17:00
Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, Laarbeeklaan 103, 1090 Brussel

How to reach the campus Jette:

<http://www.vub.ac.be/english/infoabout/campuses>

Summary of the dissertation

When confronted with terminal illness, one of the relational challenges patients and partners have to face together and integrate into their lives are changes in their intimate and sexual relationship. Sexuality has been recognized as an important component that needs to be addressed in palliative care settings working with people with terminal illness. However, despite this recognition, there has been a paucity of research on the experiences of terminally ill patients and their partners, and healthcare providers working in palliative care indicate having difficulties to address sexual issues, due to their lack of knowledge and skills.

This dissertation tries to fill this gap of knowledge by addressing three aims:

The first aim is to systematically synthesize the available evidence from qualitative research on sexual interactions during a cancer trajectory. We fulfilled a qualitative evidence synthesis of a purposeful sample of qualitative papers, using principles of meta-ethnography.

The second aim is to explore how patients with terminal cancer and partners experience sexuality and intimacy. We performed an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis with a multi-perspective design, in which we conducted in-depth interviews with terminally ill patients, partners, and bereaved partners.

The third aim is to explore how palliative care nurses address sexual and relationship issues between patients and their partners in their daily practice. We also performed a generic qualitative study, in which we conducted in-depth interviews and observation study with palliative care nurses in a palliative care unit and an ambulant care team, and peer debriefing groups with palliative care teams.

Curriculum Vitae

Charlotte Benoot (°1985) is a Master in Sexology and Master in Population and Development. She started her scientific career at the Mental Health and Wellbeing research Group of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) in 2011, where she investigated the psychosocial needs of cancer patients living alone, a research project funded by the Flemish League against Cancer (KOTK). In 2014, she started with her PhD project on 'Sexuality and intimacy during terminal illness: a qualitative multi-method study of the experiences of patients and partners, and the role of palliative care nurses', funded by the Flemish Research Foundation (FWO, application number G041413N). She also started in 2016 a 4 year trajectory of becoming a licensed psychotherapist at the 'Educatieve Academie.' She is currently working as a sexologist in a clinical group practice in Gent.