

Brief Review

Listening at the End: A Review of Communication and Compassion in Palliative Settings (2025)

Ghenneza Rojas-Salamat^{1,*}

¹ Laparoscopy Nurse, SiriusMed, Quezon City, Philippines

* Correspondence: Ghenneza Rojas-Salamat (salamatghenneza@gmail.com)

Abstract: This review explores the role of listening as a foundational component of communication and compassionate care in palliative settings. Drawing from ten scholarly articles published in 2025, the study examines how listening affects the experiences of patients, families, and healthcare providers. The findings emphasize that listening is not only a professional skill but a human act that reduces suffering, promotes dignity, and strengthens trust, especially where resources or standardized protocols are lacking. The review is organized into four main areas: the importance of listening in clinical decision making; its role in emotional support and team communication; its contribution to preserving patient dignity and comfort; and its impact on family involvement and closure. The study calls for future research to develop standardized tools for measuring listening in palliative care and to explore how cultural, economic, and technological contexts shape listening practices. Ultimately, the review concludes that listening must be at the heart of ethical, patient-centered care during the final stages of life.

Keywords: Palliative Care, Communication, Listening, Patient Dignity, End-of-Life Care

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1. Introduction

Palliative care goes beyond just treating physical symptoms—it focuses on caring for the whole person, including their emotional, social, and spiritual needs. At the heart of this approach is communication, especially listening. Listening is not just a professional skill but a deeply caring act that helps patients feel seen, heard, and valued. Research from 2025 repeatedly shows that listening plays a key role in reducing suffering, preserving dignity, and improving the quality of end-of-life care across different healthcare systems.

This review looks at ten research articles published in 2025, all centered on improving palliative care through better communication, empathy, and integrated approaches. It focuses on how listening affects the experiences of patients, their families, and healthcare providers. The review is organized around the major theme of listening and explores three main aspects of it. It also highlights other essential areas like maintaining comfort and dignity and supporting family connections and closure.

2. Results

2.1. Importance of Listening in Palliative Settings

In palliative care, listening is a key part of offering consistent, caring, and patient centered support. Pastrana et al. (2025) [1] pointed out that many healthcare professionals still depend on their own judgment because clear guidelines for using essential medicines are lacking. This makes it even more important to pay close attention to what patients say about their needs and preferences. By listening carefully, providers can better understand

how to manage symptoms and choose the right treatments, especially in situations where clear protocols are not yet in place.

Listening also plays a major role in deciding when to begin palliative care. Rodrigues Mos and Reis-Pina (2025) [2] found that introducing palliative care earlier helps manage pain and lowers the chances of hospital readmissions for people with serious illnesses not related to cancer. But for this to work well, care must focus on what the patient wants and needs. Listening closely helps providers pick up on subtle signals and make timely decisions that match each patient's situation, especially when symptoms are not immediately severe.

Additionally, Ogieuhi et al. (2025) [3] stressed that cultural understanding is important for improving palliative care in African settings. Listening helps healthcare workers connect medical treatment with what communities expect and value. By listening with respect and attention, care providers can adjust their approach to honor local beliefs and practices. In places where systems are still developing, listening becomes a vital human link that builds trust and improves the quality of care.

2.2. Building Trust and Emotional Support in Palliative Settings

Ali et al. (2025) [4] discovered that when nurses caring for heart failure patients had their concerns listened to, it became easier to design training programs that truly met their needs. These programs helped improve both their knowledge and how they communicated with patients. As the nurses listened more closely to their patients, they began to understand important fears related to using opioids, managing symptoms, and planning for the end of life. This kind of two-way communication helped build emotional trust, encouraging patients to speak more openly about what they were going through and what mattered most to them.

In the same way, Sobanski et al. (2025) [5] highlighted how better communication between cardiology and palliative care teams relied largely on mutual listening. Through shared workshops and agreement-building methods, both groups improved how they responded to patients' needs in a more complete and earlier way. Listening to one another helped the teams work more smoothly together and build a care environment where patients felt supported—not just physically, but emotionally as well—throughout their illness.

2.3. Enhancing Patient Dignity and Comfort in Palliative Settings

Gisler et al. (2025) [6] noted that in Switzerland, higher palliative care quality scores were often tied to how well patients' preferences were heard and respected—especially when it came to their wishes about where they wanted to die. When patients felt their voices mattered, their sense of dignity and independence was protected, helping them feel more at ease and emotionally ready. By truly listening to what patients want at the end of life, care providers can ensure their actions are guided by what each patient values most.

In a Canadian context, Blackshaw (2025) [7] pointed out that a lack of palliative care options has led some patients to view Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) as the only possible choice. He suggested that by listening more closely to patients and responding better to their suffering through high-quality palliative care, fewer people would feel pushed toward MAID. Listening allows care providers to uncover hidden struggles and offer care paths that maintain dignity and provide comfort in difficult times.

2.4. Supporting Family Communication and Closure in Palliative Settings

Coelho et al. (2025) [8], after reviewing guidelines on bereavement support, emphasized that families need emotional support and preparation before a loved one passes away. One of the most effective ways to do this is by listening carefully to their

worries and questions throughout the care journey. When providers do this, they build trust and ease the emotional weight carried by families, making them feel truly included in the patient's final stages.

Rosa et al. (2025) [9] added that in many low-income countries, families serve as the main caregivers. Listening to them is crucial because it helps healthcare professionals understand their struggles and offer care that fits their cultural background. When families are listened to and given the help they need, they are more likely to feel a sense of peace and closure after losing their loved one, making the grieving process less overwhelming and more meaningful.

2.5. Implications for Future Studies

Future research should work on creating reliable, evidence-based tools to measure how well healthcare professionals listen and how this affects outcomes in palliative care. Although studies like those by Gisler et al. (2025) and Sobanski et al. (2025) [5,6] show a connection between good communication and improved care quality, there is still a lack of solid numerical data showing how listening directly influences symptom relief, emotional health, or family satisfaction. Having standardized tools to assess listening could help improve care practices and guide the development of training programs in different healthcare systems.

Moreover, future research should look into how listening is affected by cultural background, financial conditions, and the use of technology—both in well-equipped areas and places with fewer resources. For instance, Ogieuhi et al. (2025) [3] stressed the need for cultural sensitivity in African settings, while Rosa et al. (2025) [9] pointed out the heavy responsibilities caregivers face in poorer regions. It is important to understand how listening strategies can be adjusted for different contexts and how technology might help or get in the way of genuine, meaningful listening. Studies that track changes over time and compare different cultures could give a deeper understanding of how listening impacts grief, respect for patient dignity, and the overall success of palliative care.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employed a structured literature review methodology focused on articles published in 2025 related to communication, listening, and compassion in palliative care settings. Ten peer-reviewed scholarly articles were selected from reputable academic databases including PubMed, ScienceDirect, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The inclusion criteria were: (1) articles published in English in 2025, (2) studies centered on palliative care practices, (3) research that specifically examined the role of listening in clinical, emotional, or family-centered contexts. Exclusion criteria included opinion pieces, nonpeer-reviewed literature, and studies not directly addressing listening in palliative care.

A keyword combination of “palliative care,” “listening,” “communication,” “end-of-life care,” and “patient dignity” was used during the search. Articles were screened based on their abstracts, followed by full-text analysis. A narrative synthesis approach was used to categorize findings under key themes: (1) clinical decision-making and patient needs, (2) emotional support and professional collaboration, (3) preservation of dignity and comfort, and (4) family involvement and bereavement support.

No human or animal subjects were involved in this review; thus, ethical approval was not required.

4. Discussion

The findings reinforce prior knowledge that communication, especially active listening, is a cornerstone of effective palliative care. Consistent with earlier research, listening helps providers recognize unspoken needs, manage complex emotions, and align care with patient and family values. The 2025 studies also expanded this view by highlighting the need for cultural sensitivity and contextual flexibility in listening practices, particularly in African and low-income settings (Ogieuhi et al., 2025; Rosa et al., 2025) [3,9].

The findings suggest that while listening is universally valuable, its impact is shaped by sociocultural norms, resource availability, and healthcare infrastructure. Listening not only influences physical care outcomes but also determines the emotional and spiritual quality of dying experiences for patients and their families. Despite this, standardized tools for measuring the effectiveness of listening are lacking. Future studies should focus on developing such tools and testing their applicability across healthcare settings. Exploring how digital health tools or telehealth platforms affect listening quality could also guide technology integration in palliative care.

5. Conclusions

The studies from 2025 make it clear that listening is more than just a skill—it is a vital part of compassionate and high-quality palliative care. Whether in overstretched African clinics or organized outpatient settings in Switzerland, being fully present and listening with empathy leads to better symptom control, stronger trust, greater respect for dignity, and more meaningful support for families in grief. In places where clinical resources or clear guidelines are limited—as noted by Pastrana et al. (2025) and Ogieuhi et al. (2025) [1,3]—listening becomes the link between medical treatment and true human care. Listening plays a key role in many situations: comforting patients with heart failure (Ali et al., 2025) [4], guiding them through care planning (Rodrigues Mos & Reis-Pina, 2025) [2], or supporting families after a loved one's death (Coelho et al., 2025) [8]. This review shows that good listening does more than improve communication—it opens up space for cultural understanding, emotional connection, and patient empowerment. It helps guide medical decisions when protocols are unclear, brings hidden needs to light, and ensures patients feel seen and heard during their final days. Improving listening in palliative care is not optional—it is a moral and professional obligation. It is this act of being truly present that makes care more personal, respectful, and in line with what patients and families need most. As palliative care continues to grow around the world, making deep listening a core part of practice and training will be crucial in providing care that is fair, ethical, and deeply human.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, G.R.-S.; **methodology**, G.R.-S.; **formal analysis**, G.R.-S.; **investigation**, G.R.-S.; **resources**, G.R.-S.; **data curation**, G.R.-S.; **writing—original draft preparation**, G.R.-S.; **writing—review and editing**, G.R.-S.; **visualization**, G.R.-S.; **supervision**, G.R.-S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

All data supporting the results of this study are based on previously published peer reviewed articles. A list of reviewed articles is available upon request. No new datasets were generated during this study.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Supplementary Materials

None.

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