

About the Authors



Kathy Kortes-Miller, MSW, PhD

Kathy Kortes-Miller, MSW, PhD is an Associate professor in the School of Social Work, the Director of the Centre for Education and Research on Aging and Health and the research chair in aging and end-of-life at Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. Kathy has a passion for contributing to improving end-of-life care for all. Kathy's research is interdisciplinary and collaborative, and she is a founding member of the Canadian Grief Alliance. She is the author of the book *"Talking About Death Won't Kill You"* with ECW Press and her most recent projects include a podcast called *"Disrupting Death"* available wherever you get your podcasts and at <https://www.disruptingdeath.ca/episodes>.

Affiliations: Lakehead University



Keri-Lyn Durant, PhD

Keri-Lyn Durant, PhD Education (Lakehead University), is Knowledge Mobilization Lead on the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (of Canada) Insight Research Grant *"Disrupting Death"* which funds this podcast. She is currently also a full-time elementary school teacher. Keri-Lyn's background in applied theatre sparked a desire to learn more about digital storytelling and podcasting; she gratefully studied both through The Story Center (Berkeley, CA). In her spare time, she prefers to be outside, especially in the months that bring snow and anytime on the Bruce Trail.

Affiliations: Lakehead University

Disrupting Death and Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD): Podcasting as Public Scholarship and Knowledge Mobilization

Kathy Kortés-Miller, MSW, PhD
Keri-Lyn Durant, PhD

Introduction

Since its legalization in 2016, medical assistance in dying (MAiD) has fundamentally reshaped end-of-life care in Canada. Nearly a decade later, public discourse around MAiD has become increasingly polarized, with sensationalized media coverage often obscuring the nuanced realities of how Canadians experience decision making at end-of-life. While exceptional cases dominate headlines, there is a pressing need for knowledge translation strategies that provide accurate, contextualized, and accessible information about MAiD policies, procedures, and lived experiences.

Podcasts have emerged as an increasingly valuable methodological and knowledge mobilization tool within qualitative and community-engaged research.¹⁻³ In response to this knowledge gap, the *Disrupting Death* podcast was launched to create space for thoughtful, critical, and compassionate conversations about dying, death, grief, and MAiD. Building upon a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Insight Grant, the podcast serves as both a vehicle for research dissemination and as a platform for public scholarship that centres lived experiences alongside professional, ethical, and policy perspectives.

This paper examines the *Disrupting Death* podcast as a case study, exploring how podcasting can mobilize research findings, challenge dominant narratives, and foster more informed and empathetic public engagement with end-of-life issues.

Podcasting as Public Scholarship and Knowledge Mobilization

Researchers increasingly use podcasts to enable accessible knowledge translation beyond traditional academic audiences.^{2,3} Podcasts provide opportunities to foreground participant voices and lived experiences through audio storytelling, fostering emotional and affective engagement that enhances empathy and understanding of complex issues. Moreover, podcasts can be structured as participatory or collaborative research methods that redistribute power between researchers and communities.^{1,4,5}

Cox et al.⁶ highlight how academic podcasting challenges traditional knowledge production by offering a more informal and accessible method of engagement. The authors emphasize that podcasts facilitate broader outreach, fostering social connections and strengthening academic networks. Similarly, DeMarco³ presents a case study on the University of Toronto Mississauga's research podcast, demonstrating how this medium enhances knowledge translation and researcher visibility while reaching audiences who may lack access to traditional scholarly publications.⁷

Podcasting in Palliative and End-of-Life Care

Public awareness campaigns for palliative care have increasingly incorporated podcasts as vehicles to broaden public understanding and reduce stigma about end-of-life care.⁸ Research examining the reception of palliative care campaigns by the public identifies audio media as particularly effective for reaching diverse audiences and fostering emotional engagement

with sensitive topics.⁸ The accessibility and intimacy of audio formats which can be consumed while commuting, exercising, or performing household tasks make podcasts well-suited for public health communication about death and dying.¹

Narrative approaches to knowledge translation, including podcasting, have been shown to enhance understanding, retention, and emotional engagement, particularly in applied health and social research contexts where influencing practice and public discourse is a core objective.^{9,10} Listener feedback on scholarly podcasts suggests that integrating participant audio data helps connect listeners with research findings, enhancing uptake and impact in ways that traditional academic publications may not achieve.^{10,4}

In the specific contexts of MAiD and end-of-life care, podcasts can facilitate public conversations that challenge stigma, offer accessible education, and mobilize research findings to inform policy and practice. Additionally, podcasts may challenge dominant narratives about “good deaths” or stigmatized forms of loss by creating counter-narratives that centre marginalized experiences and perspectives.⁵

The Disrupting Death Podcast: Overview and Approach

Disrupting Death is a Canadian podcast that creates space for thoughtful, critical, and compassionate conversations about dying, death, grief, and MAiD. The podcast builds upon an SSHRC Insight Grant and aims to offer accessible conversations that reduce stigma and challenge overly simplistic narratives about end-of-life experiences by centring lived experiences alongside professional, ethical, and policy perspectives.

Production and Format

Since its launch, *Disrupting Death* has published 39 episodes on a monthly schedule, featuring dozens of guests across health, social care, policy, research, and community sectors. Guests have included physicians, social workers, nurses, ethicists, coroners, policymakers, advocates, researchers, people with lived experience, and family members. Additionally, the podcast has interviewed artists, including

playwrights, authors, photographers, and musicians, whose work interfaces with MAiD.

Episodes are typically interview-based and conversational in tone, allowing guests to share their expertise and situated knowledge through reflective responses to questions that may be absent from formal academic or clinical spaces. Unlike conventional medical podcasts in which a case is introduced, discussed, and summarized for learning objectives,¹¹ *Disrupting Death* employs a semi-structured approach that allows for organic and rich discussions in conjunction with questions prepared in advance. This methodology enables conversations to follow wherever guests lead, creating space for unexpected insights and authentic dialogue.

Reach and Impact

The podcast has achieved substantial reach and engagement, with thousands of downloads and listeners in over 25 countries, reflecting global interest in end-of-life issues and MAiD. The most downloaded episode to date is Episode 4, entitled “A Death Positive Approach to Children and MAiD: Disrupting Death with Cynthia Clark.”¹²

Episodes are used as teaching tools in social work, healthcare, and education, serving as knowledge mobilization resources for practitioners, policymakers, and community organizations. Healthcare educators have reported using the podcast as “required listening” in their courses, while volunteer groups such as hospices have incorporated it into their training programs. This integration into professional and educational contexts demonstrates the podcast’s value as both a pedagogical resource and a knowledge translation tool.

Core Themes in Disrupting Death

Three overarching themes consistently emerge across episodes of *Disrupting Death*, reflecting the podcast’s commitment to public scholarship and social justice-oriented knowledge mobilization.

Theme 1: Centring Lived Experience to Challenge Policy and Practice

Disrupting Death is committed to centring lived experiences. Episodes foreground the voices of people who are dying, navigating MAiD, providing formal and informal care,

working as clinicians, and experiencing grief and bereavement. Rather than simply illustrating policy debates, these narratives strive to centre individual experiences of how macro systems and professional practices are experienced by Canadians.

A notable example of this commitment is the podcast's integration of digital storytelling as both a research method and a knowledge mobilization strategy. As part of the broader SSHRC research project, caregivers of people who used MAiD at the end of their lives created digital stories about their experiences. Digital stories are typically 3–5 minutes in length, feature first-person narratives, and may use still or moving images, music, or sound effects to tell a story about a person, event, or issue.¹³

The project produced 13 digital stories created with participants from across Canada who have intimate experiences with MAiD. The digital story creators were subsequently invited to participate as podcast guests to discuss their experiences with creating the stories. A coordinated “trifecta” of episodes released in August 2024 ensured that all participants' voices were heard. These digital stories have been shared in university classes, public talks, academic conferences, and are available on the project website for viewing. The digital story creators retain ownership of their stories and have been sharing them widely within their own networks.

To support the ethical and thoughtful use of these stories, the project team recently developed a digital story viewing toolkit, available [here](#)

The digital stories themselves can be accessed via the project website: [here](#)

This integration of digital storytelling into the podcast demonstrates how multiple forms of narrative knowledge can be mobilized in complementary ways, amplifying the voices of those with lived experience while providing accessible entry points for diverse audiences. The podcast consistently demonstrates that ethical and policy decisions about dying must be informed by how people live, suffer, hope, and grieve.

Theme 2: Interrogating Power, Inequity, and Social Justice at the End of Life

Disrupting Death applies a social justice lens to end-of-life care and MAiD. Conversations with invited guests consistently include questions of power: Who gets access to quality palliative and end-of-life care? Whose suffering is recognized

as legitimate? How do poverty, disability, racism, geography, and colonial legacies shape end-of-life options?

Rather than treating MAiD or palliative end-of-life care as neutral clinical interventions, the podcast situates them within broader structural conditions, emphasizing that inequity at the end-of-life mirrors inequity across the life course. This critical approach challenges listeners to consider how systemic barriers, including inadequate healthcare access, housing insecurity, disability discrimination, and the ongoing impacts of colonialism, shape who has meaningful choices at the end-of-life and whose deaths are deemed “good” or “dignified.” Through these structural analyses, *Disrupting Death* strives to contribute to a more complex and equity-informed public discourse about MAiD.

Theme 3: Normalizing Difficult Conversations About Death, Dying, and Grief

A third unifying theme is the deliberate effort to make conversations about death less hidden, less fearful, and more normalized within everyday discourse. Through accessible dialogue, reflective storytelling, and the use of gentle humour, the hosts model how to talk about dying, loss, and grief without shutting down or oversimplifying individual experiences.

The podcast hosts value curiosity, listening, and emotional honesty. A goal of the podcast is to contribute to broader death literacy and grief literacy, encouraging both professionals and the public to engage more openly with dying, death, loss, and grief as part of everyday life. This is particularly important in a cultural context in which death is often medicalized, isolated, and removed from public conversation.

Listener Evaluation

In the spring of 2025, the podcast team conducted a qualitative survey to learn more about the listenership and identify areas for improvement. The survey results showed that *Disrupting Death* is received as a trusted and meaningful resource for audiences engaging with MAiD in both personal and professional capacities.

Audience Demographics and Engagement

As expected, respondents are predominantly based in Canada, and most listeners from other countries also live in jurisdictions where assisted dying is legal. This suggests the podcast is reaching an audience directly navigating or working within this policy and practice context. Listeners most commonly reported tuning in to learn more about the MAiD process, or because they had supported someone through MAiD, underscoring the podcast's role as both an educational and experiential resource.

Engagement levels were high, with most respondents reporting they had listened to multiple episodes, with over 40% indicating that they had listened to over half of the available episodes. This engagement indicates genuine interest rather than one-off listening, suggesting that the podcast often maintains listener attention across episodes.

Qualitative Feedback

Qualitative feedback from listeners consistently described the podcast as accessible, informative, and well-balanced in tone, elaborating that it is serious without being overly sombre. Many highlighted the warm and welcoming approach of the hosts, as well as the diversity of voices and perspectives featured, including lived experience, professional expertise, and policy insight.

What survey respondents report valuing is the podcast's ability to create a dedicated space for nuanced, Canadian-specific conversations about MAiD, grounded in real-world experiences. The majority of respondents overwhelmingly indicated they plan to continue listening and would recommend the podcast to colleagues, patients, friends, and others navigating MAiD. This feedback confirms that *Disrupting Death* is fulfilling its knowledge mobilization mandate, reaching audiences and providing a resource that bridges research, practice, and lived experience.

Discussion: Podcasting as Knowledge Mobilization

Across its episodes, *Disrupting Death* operates at the intersection of story, system, and social change. The podcast mobilizes research and lived experience to inform public understanding,

professional practice, and policy discourse related to end-of-life care and MAiD. By integrating experiential knowledge, equity-focused analysis, and accessible communication, the podcast contributes to meaningful, evidence-informed engagement with complex social and ethical issues at the end-of-life.

The podcast demonstrates how audio storytelling can serve as a powerful knowledge translation tool, making academic research accessible to non-academic audiences while maintaining rigour. By featuring researchers, practitioners, and people with lived experience in conversation, *Disrupting Death* models interdisciplinary and community-engaged approaches to knowledge production and dissemination.

The integration of digital storytelling further amplifies this bridging function, providing multiple entry points for engagement and ensuring that participant voices remain central to how research is communicated and understood. This multi-modal approach to knowledge mobilization recognizes that different audiences engage with information in diverse ways and that narrative forms of knowledge can be particularly powerful for fostering empathy and understanding.

The podcast strives to provide accurate, contextualized information grounded in research and lived experience offering an alternative to uncritical advocacy and fear-mongering opposition. This is particularly important in the current polarized climate around MAiD, where misinformation and disinformation increasingly dominate public discourse.

Perhaps most importantly, *Disrupting Death* contributes to broader cultural shifts toward increased death literacy and more open public dialogue about dying, death, and grief. By normalizing difficult conversations and modelling how to engage with uncertainty and complexity, the podcast supports listeners in developing the knowledge, skills, and emotional capacities needed to navigate end-of-life issues in their own lives.

Looking Forward: The Future of Disrupting Death

As *Disrupting Death* approaches its third year of production, the podcast team remains reflective about where MAiD legislation might lead and how the podcast might contribute to emerging conversations. The team is cognizant of a shift in focus in media coverage of MAiD, noting

an increasingly polarized landscape in which anti-MAiD proponents often characterized by spreading misinformation and disinformation, have garnered much of the attention.

Disrupting Death remains committed to providing a platform for accurate information to be disseminated so that Canadians can access reliable resources to make informed decisions about end-of-life choices. The podcast's continued emphasis on lived experience and accessible communication positions it as a counterweight to sensationalized or ideologically driven coverage.

Moving forward, the podcast aims to continue serving as a comprehensive resource that humanizes the conversation around MAiD, offering diverse perspectives and fostering deeper understanding of this complex and sensitive topic. *Disrupting Death* maintains its commitment to public scholarship, knowledge mobilization, and social justice, and will continue to strive to contribute to a more informed, empathetic, and equity-oriented public discourse about end-of-life care in Canada.

Correspondence

Kathy Kortess-Miller, MSW, PhD

Email: kkortesm@lakeheadu.ca

Financial Disclosures

K.K.M.: None declared.

K.L.D.: None declared.

References

1. Day L, Cunsolo A, Castleden H, Martin D, Hart C, Anaviapik-Soucie T, et al. The expanding digital media landscape of qualitative and decolonizing research: examining collaborative podcasting as a research method. *MediaTropes*. 2017;7(1):203–228.
2. Kinkaid E, Emard K, Senanayake N. The podcast-as-method?: Critical reflections on using podcasts to produce geographic knowledge. *Geographical Review*. 2020;110(1/2):78–91. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48584090>
3. DeMarco C. (2022). Hear here! The case for podcasting in research. *The Journal of Research Administration*. 2022;53(1):30–61. <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/>
4. Densley B, Dickson-Swift V, Mills J. Scholarly podcasting: lessons from disseminating grounded theory findings on singing facilitation. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 2025;24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940692513646>
5. Goodman A, Keeble J, Pocrnich A. Unsilencing stories: creating a counter-memorial podcast with bereaved people affected by Canada's opioid overdose crisis. *Journalism Practice*. 2025;19(11):2671–2692. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2024.2314721>
6. Cox AM, Harrison HL, Partelow S, Curtis S, Elser SR, Hammond Wagner C, et al. How academic podcasting can change academia and its relationship with society: a conversation and guide. *Front Commun*. 2023;8:1090112. [doi:10.3389/fcomm.2023.1090112](https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2023.1090112)
7. Persohn M, Branson S. Broadening legitimacy of scholarly podcasting as knowledge dissemination: metrics, opportunities and considerations. *Pub Res Q*. 2024;40:269–286. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-024-10005-5>
8. Matthys M, Deforche B, Deliens L, Cohen J, Beernaert K, Van Brussel L, et al. Public awareness campaigns on palliative care: applying a multidimensional model to understand the reception by the general public. *Qual Health Res*. 2024;35(13):1508–1523. [doi:10.1177/10497323241300911](https://doi.org/10.1177/10497323241300911)
9. Abel J, Kellehear A. Palliative care reimagined: a needed shift. *BMJ Support Palliat Care*. 2016;6(1):21–26. [doi:10.1136/bmjspcare-2015-001009](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjspcare-2015-001009)
10. Shaw PA, Sumner AL, Halton CC, Bailey SC, Wolf MS, Andrews E, et al. "You're more engaged when you're listening to somebody tell their story": a qualitative exploration into the mechanisms of the podcast 'menopause: unmuted' for communicating health information. *Patient Educ Couns*. 2022;105(22):3494–3500.
11. Brown CA, Caldwell P, Scott KM, Colgan JN, Holland AJA. Introducing a short-medium format, paediatric surgical podcast into the formal teaching resources of a medical school. *Journal of Pediatric Surgery Open*. 2024;8:100172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.yjps.2024.100172>
12. *Disrupting Death*. A podcast about medical assistance in dying [Internet]. 2026; [cited 10 February 2026]. Available from: www.disruptingdeath.ca
13. Lambert J. *Digital storytelling: capturing lives, creating community*. 4th ed. London UK: Routledge; 2013. 224 p. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203102329>