

Interview with Bernadette Fittkau, Center for Palliative Medicine, University of Munich

Bernadette Fittkau-Tönnemann M.P.H. postgraduate, medical doctor, anesthetist, is the Director of the Christophorus Education Center for Palliative Care, Interdisciplinary Center for Palliative Medicine, Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich. The Challenge X method is used as one of the teaching methods in several contexts within palliative care courses.

What differentiates ChallengeX from other programs?

I consider it a very relevant aspect that during the trainings we don't work with abstract models but with a very concrete situation within a well defined theoretical framework. We usually have very heterogenous groups consisting of residents as well as chiefs of staff and everybody can chose his or her own specific starting point or issue which he or she wants to work on.

Within these groups of very different medical areas there are often tensions. Through these trainings we are able to set new impulses so that things that used to be difficult, which we were afraid to lay a hand on, are now becoming increasingly easier to handle. We are now able to meet each other in a more trusting way. People realize how their way of communication changes after the training and are thus able to connect not without distance but with a new and very positive quality. E.g. there is enough room within the training to experience something like active listening, what it really means not to speak and just to listen, to accept stillness. Those things are integrated very incidentally instead of being taught in a strict student-teacher way.

What do you consider sustainable results?

What we see in people who attend trainings in which we incorporate parts of the ChallengeX approach is that their perception starts to change and their sensitivity for certain challenges increases. Also they are more able to work out difficult situations and come up with solutions that before had been unthinkable. However, there are also people who expect recipes and who want to learn how to do things "right". Those are difficult to reach. But most have understood that it is more important to just allow certain things to happen and to each find his or her own individual way. They understand that it is crucial to meet each new situation openly but with a set of reflections that one can apply. Yet it is also important that those who are looking for recipes learn in which situations recipes can actually help and in what kind of situations a simple "bag of tricks" cannot be applied. E.g. when I work with my patients there are no preset sentences and formulas but it is imperative to learn to meet them with one's own intuition, spontaneity and personal experiences.

