

# To Live Like a Sunflower: Symbolism and Palliative Care in Hospice Logos

<https://doi.org/10.32635/2176-9745.RBC.2025v71n2.4827EN>

*Viver como um Girassol: Simbolismo e Cuidados Paliativos em Logotipos de Hospices*

*Vivir como un Girasol: Simbolismo y Cuidados Paliativos en los Logotipos de los Hospices*

Mariana Fernandes Costa<sup>1</sup>; Bruna Cezar Diniz<sup>2</sup>; Antonio Tadeu Cheriff dos Santos<sup>3</sup>

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The relationship between the human being and symbols is the aim of various studies in philosophy, anthropology, and psychology. In the palliative care context, the presence of sunflowers associated with hospices is recurrent, especially in logotypes, sparking interest in understanding and reflecting on the meaning of sunflowers and their symbology to hospices. **Objective:** To investigate the relationship between the image of the sunflower, hospice logotypes, and the philosophy of palliative care. **Method:** Qualitative research with analysis based on Peirce's semiotic theory of 16 hospice logos obtained from a Google images search in April 2021 using the descriptors "sunflower", "palliative care", and "hospices". **Results:** Three thematic categories were identified: "sunflower as an expression of the life cycle"; "sunflower as an intention of care"; and "sunflower as an element of spirituality". After a literature review on the etymological, symbolic, mythical, and poetic meanings of the sunflower, its use on logotypes was discovered to symbolize and evoke the transformations of time, human life cycles, and the human search for connection with life and spirituality. **Conclusion:** Sunflowers in hospice logos are a sign and symbol of palliation, aimed at caring for patients and their families, emphasizing life and living.

**Key words:** Palliative Care; Hospice Care; Helianthus; Symbolism.

## RESUMO

**Introdução:** A relação entre o homem e os símbolos é objeto de estudo de diversos pesquisadores nas áreas da filosofia, antropologia e psicologia. No contexto dos cuidados paliativos, verifica-se a presença frequente do girassol associado a *hospices*, principalmente em logotipos, despertando o interesse em refletir e compreender o significado do girassol nos cuidados paliativos e sua simbologia para os *hospices*. **Objetivo:** Investigar a relação entre a imagem do girassol, logotipos de *hospices* e a filosofia dos cuidados paliativos. **Método:** Pesquisa qualitativa com análise baseada na teoria semiótica de Peirce de 16 logotipos de *hospices*, obtidos em abril de 2021, pela ferramenta Google imagens com os descritores "girassol", "cuidados paliativos" e "*hospices*". **Resultados:** Foram identificadas três categorias temáticas: "girassol como expressão do ciclo da vida"; "girassol como intenção de cuidado"; e "girassol como elemento de espiritualidade". Os girassóis nos logotipos, após revisão bibliográfica sobre o significado etimológico, simbólico, mítico e poético do girassol, simbolizam e evocam as transformações do tempo e os ciclos de vida do ser humano e a sua busca de conexão com a vida e a espiritualidade. **Conclusão:** O girassol nos logotipos é um signo e símbolo da palição nos *hospices*, tendo como intenção de cuidado o paciente e seus familiares, dando ênfase à vida e ao viver.

**Palavras-chave:** Cuidados Paliativos; Cuidados Paliativos na Terminalidade da Vida; Helianthus; Simbolismo.

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** La relación entre el hombre y los símbolos es objeto de estudio por varios investigadores en las áreas de la filosofía, la antropología y la psicología. En el contexto de los cuidados paliativos, es frecuente la presencia del girasol asociado a los *hospices*, especialmente en logos, despertando el interés por reflexionar y comprender el significado del girasol en los cuidados paliativos y su simbolismo para los *hospices*. **Objetivo:** Investigar la relación entre la imagen del girasol, los logos de *hospices* y la filosofía de los cuidados paliativos. **Método:** Investigación cualitativa con análisis basado en la teoría semiótica de Peirce de los 16 logos de *hospices*, obtenidos en abril de 2021, utilizando la herramienta de imágenes de Google con los descriptors "girasol", "cuidados paliativos" y "*hospices*". **Resultados:** Se identificaron tres categorías temáticas: "el girasol como expresión del ciclo vital", "el girasol como intención de cuidar" y "el girasol como elemento de espiritualidad". Los girasoles en los logos, luego de una revisión bibliográfica sobre el significado etimológico, simbólico, mítico y poético del girasol, simbolizan y evocan las transformaciones del tiempo y los ciclos vitales del ser humano y su búsqueda de conexión con la vida y la espiritualidad. **Conclusión:** El girasol en los logos es un signo y un símbolo de paliación en los *hospices*, con la intención de cuidar al paciente y sus familiares, enfatizando la vida y el vivir.

**Palabras clave:** Cuidados Paliativos; Cuidados Paliativos al Final de la Vida; Helianthus; Simbolismo.

<sup>1,3</sup>Instituto Nacional de Câncer (INCA). Rio de Janeiro (RJ), Brasil.

<sup>1</sup>E-mail: marifcosta@gmail.com. Orcid iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7702-1841>

<sup>2</sup>E-mail: bruna.diniz5@outlook.com. Orcid iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1937-9087>

<sup>3</sup>E-mail: cheriff@inca.gov.br. Orcid iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3577-0772>

**Corresponding author:** Mariana Fernandes Costa. Rua Visconde de Santa Isabel, 274-A – Vila Isabel. Rio de Janeiro (RJ), Brasil. CEP 20560-121. E-mail: marifcosta@gmail.com



## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between human beings and symbols is the subject of various studies in philosophy, anthropology, and psychology<sup>1</sup>. Talking and thinking about symbols is also an integral part of the art of caring and producing knowledge in the field of Health, considering the vast repertoire of daily life images, from birth to the end of life. Symbols that used to be common and universally understood, like the ones for death — scythes, skulls, skeletons, tombs, and hourglasses — tend to erase the personality of those who are dying or mourning, in addition to emphasizing other painful aspects of death<sup>2</sup>. Thus, they do not seem to be enough to inspire logotypes (logos, for short) for palliative care or hospice services.

The function of a logo is to announce a service and its purpose. If it is generally hard to imagine and talk about death, palliative care services or hospices have a much more specific task. The philosophy of palliative care is based on principles that aim to ensure the quality of life and comfort of patients and their families. Active and integral care is provided for people with severe, progressive, and life-threatening diseases. Such care does not anticipate or prolong death but focuses on controlling symptoms and providing emotional, social, and spiritual support. This approach is holistic, acknowledging death as a natural process and emphasizing dignity, especially in end-of-life care, which is part of palliative care<sup>3</sup>.

Despite this kind of care being a relief for society in coping with an advanced illness, it would be preferable to deny its existence, so the logo cannot be too straightforward, hinting at the fact that the business involves sickness and finitude. Thus, the logo must communicate the challenging distinction of the institution's role while transmitting an image of comfort and safety, resignifying those themes<sup>2</sup>.

Despite promoting relief of physical and emotional symptoms for people and their families dealing with chronic and severe illnesses, palliative care is still little understood by the population and is usually recommended at a later point in the course of the illness. Studies that assessed the perception of health professionals and patients on palliative care showed a view strongly associated with the terminal character, with stigmatized discourses that demonstrate a shallow understanding of the subject, in addition to professionals having difficulties communicating hard news<sup>4,5</sup>.

A possible solution to this fact, according to Berry, Castellani, and Stuart<sup>6</sup>, is rebranding the notion people have of palliative care. To those authors, communication and marketing actions may spark consciousness, interest, and foster the use of palliation by health professionals and

society's demand for it. In addition, they mention that “palliative care, effectively delivered, can restore a lost sense of control, independence, and peace of mind that patients and families cherish”<sup>6</sup>.

Previous research, conducted in two palliative care units within oncology hospitals in Brazil and Portugal, studied the image of the butterfly and its symbolic relationship with palliative care<sup>7</sup>. In this context, the presence of sunflowers associated with hospices, especially in logos, was verified, sparking interest in understanding and reflecting on the meaning of sunflowers in palliative care and their symbology to hospices.

Given that studies on logos in the palliative care field are scarce, this research investigated the relationship between the image of the sunflower, hospice logos, and the philosophy of palliative care, seeking to understand the meaning of the codes established in the human discourse domain and the production of meaning of sickness and finitude in social practices. Therefore, this study considered the notion and concept of hospice as intrinsically connected to patients with cancer and the philosophy of palliative care. A hospice is a place where palliative care is offered, promoting integral and humanized care to patients with cancer and other terminal diseases to alleviate suffering, improve quality of life, and promote comfort and dignity at the end of life.

## METHOD

The study followed the qualitative paradigm, in which the investigator, in an interpretive approach, aims to grasp and understand the sense and meaning that people attribute to social phenomena<sup>8</sup>. The task of qualitative research is to ask how meaning is created in daily social practices, shedding light on issues related to collective production and determination of those meanings. This study is grounded in the semiotic theory of the science of signs, which arose as doctors in the Western world attempted to understand how body and mind operate within cultural domains<sup>9</sup>.

The semiotic approach values the process of producing sense and the way a message provokes meaning, from the verification of categories of signs, their articulations, and particularities, communicating something meaningful to human beings<sup>10</sup>. The task is to “unmask” this naturalization process based on the cultural influence that communicates something from the signs in the images or contrasting them with elements present in models, theories, and conceptions of society. The semiological explanation reveals what is implied in an image<sup>8</sup>.

The primary components of this process can be understood and characterized in terms of categorization

of the following elements: the referred object (which can be concrete or abstract); the sign (an image or representative icon, a word etc.); and the meaning that indicates, by association, how the sign and the object are connected and translate a perception, an idea, an emotion, a feeling and a knowledge. This theory approaches the relationship between what exists and how such ideas or values are represented<sup>9</sup>.

By analyzing logos, this study aims to deepen understanding of orientations, yearnings, and anxieties of the current time, which are often silently transmitted through images<sup>11</sup>.

The research material was obtained from a Google image internet search<sup>12</sup> using the following search strategy: (Sunflower AND (“Palliative care” OR Hospice\*) AND “Logo”), done by a single researcher in April 2021. The inclusion criteria considered only logo images containing sunflowers that were related to hospices. Images that were not logos, logos with no sunflowers, and duplicated images were excluded. After viewing the images, to characterize each institution, their respective electronic addresses were accessed for data collection on their location and the type of service offered.

Throughout the study, the researchers sent emails to the hospices asking permission to use their logos, but no answer was obtained. By using resources from the Canva<sup>®</sup> software, new images adapted from the studied logos were elaborated to enrich understanding, using the same visual elements in focus, omitting the original institutions’ names.

To understand the senses and meanings of the hospice logos found, a visual and thematic analysis was conducted, using the sunflower as the main subject, categorized by Peirce’s semiotic theory concepts (icon, symbol, index). These elements are differentiated by the understanding of the relationship between the signifier and the signified, and can be characterized in the following ways<sup>13</sup>:

- Icon – resembling or imitating what the image is intended to represent, like a photograph.
- Symbol – signs associated with conventional meaning or a natural instinct, or an intellectual act that takes it as a representative of its object, even without a factual connection between the signifier and the signified, for instance, a white dove that represents peace.
- Index – the inherent relationship between signifier and signified, or a connection of cause and effect that can be observed or inferred, that is, smoke signaling fire.

For a deeper understanding of the content of the meanings of logos, it was necessary to analyze the image

beyond its appearance, focusing on the subject matter and the cultural and conventional meanings behind it. In the case of logos, the profound meanings of being born, becoming ill, and dying. In the present study, the relationship between the sunflower and palliative care or hospices was also interpreted from the etymological and symbolic meaning of the sunflower, present in mythology, art, poetry, literature, and music.

After analyzing the material, thematic categories were identified through the inductive method. The ideas by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross<sup>14</sup> and Carl Jung<sup>15</sup> served as a theoretical framework for the symbolic articulation of the sunflower in this context and to deepen the senses and meanings of sunflowers in hospice logos.

Since this study uses free, publicly available secondary data, it does not require consideration of a Research Ethics Committee, according to Resolution no. 510/16<sup>16</sup> of the National Health Council.










## RESULTS

A total of 724 images were retrieved from the search; 623 were excluded because they were not logos, 43 were excluded because they lacked a sunflower, and 32 were excluded because they were duplicates, leaving 26 eligible images. Among the institutional logos featuring sunflowers, 16 were from hospices and ten from related societies or foundations. The analysis included the 16 hospice logos. The relevant hospices are located in the United Kingdom (5), the United States of America (4), Ireland (3), Canada (3), and Malta (1). The signs (icon, symbol, and index) identified from the semiotic analysis of hospice logos featuring sunflowers are presented in Chart 1, along with adapted images of the studied logos, highlighting in bold type the elements that most contributed to identifying ideas in the elaborated categories.

The textual elements of the semiotic analysis include the name of the hospice as a linguistic component, highlighted in its logo image. The visual component considers typographic and spatial aspects of the image. In every image, the sunflower is represented by a drawing, preserving the yellow color for its petals, and the flower’s middle varying from brown to orange. Besides black, the textual content uses the colors green, blue, and yellow. Only two logos present the color pink in a light hue.








After analyzing the material to assess the senses and meanings of sunflowers in hospice logos, the following three thematic categories were identified through the inductive method: “sunflower as an expression of the life cycle”; “sunflower as an intention of care”; and “sunflower as an element of spirituality”. These categories will be discussed next with the analysis conducted.

Chart 1. Characterization in icon, symbol, and index from the semiotic analysis of hospice logos containing a sunflower

CODE	LOGO	ICON	SYMBOL	INDEX
LOGO 1		Sunflower replacing the <b>dot of the letter "i"</b> in the word hospice	Expression "dot the i's and cross the t's" (straighten things out). <b>Something to be clarified</b>	Discovery, revelation, or <b>unveiling</b> of the purpose of hospices
LOGO 2		Sunflower replacing the <b>dot of the letter "i"</b> in the word hospice	Expression "dot the i's and cross the t's" (straighten things out). <b>Something to be clarified</b>	Discovery, revelation, or <b>unveiling</b> of the purpose of hospices
LOGO 3		Middle of the sunflower outlined by the <b>letter "o"</b> of the word "hospice" or the name of the institution	The <b>circle</b> symbolizing the <b>womb</b>	Fertility, creativity, and <b>renewal</b> . Process of <b>transformation and restart</b> . Return to integral care
LOGO 4		Middle of the sunflower outlined by the <b>letter "o"</b> of the word "hospice" or the name of the institution	The <b>circle</b> symbolizing the <b>womb</b>	Fertility, creativity, and <b>renewal</b> . Process of <b>transformation and restart</b> . Return to integral care
LOGO 5		Two <b>green leaves</b> that accommodate the sunflower with its <b>yellow petals</b> and a dotted <b>middle</b> representing a grid of seeds	Leaves as <b>hands</b> that support the <b>patient and their relatives</b> represented by the dots <b>at the center</b> of the flower and yellow petals that <b>transfer solar energy</b> to the seeds	<b>Support</b> and compassionate care. <b>Patient and relatives in the center of care</b> . Offering relief and <b>comfort</b> . <b>Refuge</b>
LOGO 6		The sunflower petals are shaped like a <b>yellow crown</b> and the <b>middle</b> of the flower has a <b>brown heart</b>	Heart representing a <b>new residence</b> in agreement with the message "where people come to live"	<b>Safe haven filled with affection</b> where one can live
LOGO 7		The drawing of a <b>house</b> in the <b>middle</b> of the yellow-petal sunflower	House at the center representing <b>care offered at home</b> withing the hospice model	<b>Safe haven filled with affection</b> where one can live and be cared for. Protected house
LOGO 8		Sunflower adjacent to the hospice name, to the <b>left</b>	The hospice is a place of <b>sheltering and support</b> , including home care modality	<b>It is not about bodies and medical machines</b> , but about <b>people</b> with whom the hospice is involved and cares at this specific time in their lives
LOGO 9		<b>Sunflower at the center</b> of the hospice name demonstrates its <b>pride</b> . Irregular leaves, giving the impression of being blown by the wind	The sunflower translates in its <b>growth</b> the light and energy of the sun. The <b>light</b> that shines in the darkness may be connected to the Christian quote in which Jesus says, "I am the light of the world"	Hospice as a place where darkness and fear are dissipated by the belief in the <b>existence of some higher power</b>

Continue...

Chart 1. Continuation

CODE	LOGO	ICON	SYMBOL	INDEX
LOGO 10		Sunflower adjacent to the hospice name showing that it has acquired a <b>bigger size</b> , being <b>more attractive</b> to <b>pollinizers</b> for reproduction, and the beginning of a new cycle	The sunflower translates in its growth the light and energy of the sun. The <b>sunflower turned to the light</b> like the human soul seeks the light of faith and connection with deep spirituality	Hospice as a place where darkness and fear are dissipated by the belief in the existence of some higher power. <b>Search of spirituality.</b> Maturity, transfiguration, and eternity
LOGO 11		A <b>dove</b> as if <b>carrying a sunflower</b> , which at the same time looks like the sun setting on the <b>horizon</b>	The dove is a symbol whose origins date back to the Old Testament when the dove returns to Noah's Ark holding an olive branch, signaling the end of the flood, becoming universally recognized as the symbol of <b>peace, hope</b> , and a good life after the deluge	This image reflects the hospice philosophy of a good death and maybe a life after death. It implies <b>hope and light amidst the darkness.</b> Freedom and peace, safe flight
LOGO 12		Sunflower resembling a <b>setting sun</b> in the horizon	<b>Sunflower saying farewell</b> like the sun that sets at the end of a journey	The sun implies <b>hope</b> , light amidst the darkness. <b>Finitude</b> , end of day/cycle. <b>Farewell</b>
LOGO 13		Realistic image of a sunflower on the <b>right side</b> of the hospice name	The <b>yellow color</b> of the sunflower indicates warmth and symbolizes the energy of the sun	Good <b>vibrations</b> and <b>hope</b>
LOGO 14		Sunflower exclusively in the <b>yellow color</b> , with a <b>dotted middle</b> ; highlight to the <b>radiated form</b>	Allusion to the <b>solar star</b> , its light, strength, and energy	<b>Eternity, transfiguration, and maturity</b>
LOGO 15		<b>Yellow petals</b> arranged in a circle resembling a <b>sunflower</b> that is losing its petals	The <b>loss of petals</b> of the sunflower transmits the idea of a process of <b>losses as the illness and life progress</b>	Parting, change, <b>natural cycle of life-death process</b> , restart
LOGO 16		Sunflower exclusively in the <b>yellow color</b> , with a <b>dotted middle</b> ; highlight to its <b>circular form. Stem and roots like a continuity line from the flower</b>	The yellow flower alludes to the idea that the flower stems from <b>strong roots under fertile ground.</b> Fertility is associated with the sunflower's ability to <b>generate life even after wilting and dying</b>	<b>Continued care. Strength and fertility.</b> Maturity, transfiguration, eternity, and <b>restart.</b> Rooting



## DISCUSSION

The object is known, but its symbolic implications are ignored; that is, their actual meanings are not explicit. According to Carl Jung<sup>15</sup>:

What we call a symbol is a term, a name, or even an image that can be familiar in daily life, though it has special connotations beyond its evident and conventional meaning. It implicates something vague, unknown, or hidden to us<sup>15</sup>.

Thus, Jung<sup>15</sup> understands that “a word or an image is symbolic when it implicates something beyond their manifested and immediate meaning”, therefore presents a “broader unconscious aspect, that is never precisely defined or entirely explained”. Thus, given the innumerable things that escape human understanding, we seek to use symbolic terms to represent concepts that cannot be defined or entirely understood. Some symbols are related to culture or something relevant to a certain society, entailing possible reactions. Therefore, the aspects are important in mental structure<sup>15</sup>.

According to philosopher Ernest Cassirer<sup>1</sup>, men should be defined as *animal symbolicus*, considering the symbol as determinant for the culture and an occult sense that men carry with them. It is through symbolic language that communication occurs between people, manifested through religion, language, art, history, and myth.

A Greek Mythology fable, for instance, addresses the creation of the sunflower<sup>17</sup>:

Clytia was a water nymph in love with Phebo, the sun god, who, on the other hand, did not reciprocate her love. So, she withered away, sitting all day on the cold floor, her undone braids cascading over her shoulders. For nine days, she remained there without eating or drinking, her tears and the cold dew being her only source of nutrients. She contemplated the sun when it rose, following its course with her gaze until it set; Clytia looked at nothing else, her face turned constantly towards the sun. Finally, her legs rooted to the ground, and her face became a flower, the sunflower, which turns its stem always towards the sun during the day, as it kept the feeling of the nymph that made it sprout<sup>17</sup>.

Generally speaking, each flower has its symbol, however, it is still a symbol of the passive principle, which manifests itself in the development of the flower from the earth and water. So, the flower cup, as a chalice, receives activities from the sky, whose symbols are rain and dew<sup>18</sup>.

The sunflower, on the other hand, represents hope and connection with the divine (the Clytia myth), offering a symbol of strength and renewal during hard times. Rain and dew are elements that nourish the sunflower and can be interpreted as care and compassionate support offered by health professionals and by the community, who actively nourish and sustain patients on their journey<sup>18</sup>.

Palliation can be understood as an essential element in the process of care for patients and their families, as the World Health Organization<sup>19</sup> defines palliative care as:

An approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families who are facing a life-threatening illness by preventing and relieving suffering through the early identification, correct assessment, and treatment of pain and other symptoms, whether physical, psychosocial, or spiritual<sup>19</sup>.

Parallel to palliative care, the hospice movement is growing in Brazil. The word *hospice* derives from Latin and initially meant “lodging”, a more common concept in European and North American countries. It is not necessarily a physical location, but a philosophy of care that applies intensive palliative care to people with advanced illnesses or near the end of life and offers support to mourning families. The hospice model is marked by the work of Cicely Saunders with the foundation of the St. Christopher's Hospice, in 1967, in England<sup>20</sup>. Most of the analyzed logos' institutions are located in the United Kingdom. Therefore, hospices are places that work as receptacles for a passive manifestation of care, acting as a haven in the transformation from an impersonal death to a humanized death.

## Sunflower as an expression of the life cycle

The sunflower is an annual plant. Its botanical name is *Helianthus annuus L.*, and comes from the Greek “*helios*” that means “sun”, “*anthos*” meaning “flower”, and “*annuus*”, year. The “sun flower” is adaptable to distinct environmental conditions and is from the family of *Compositae*. Its stem is used in the fabrication of paper. The seeds are used to produce cooking oil, biodiesel, bird food, lubricants, and soaps. The flower is used in decoration due to its beauty and lushness<sup>21,22</sup>. The common name heliotrope indicates its solar character, resulting from heliotropism and the radiated shape of its flower<sup>23</sup>.

The sunflower can turn towards the sun, following its rays that benefit plant growth. However, only young sunflowers can do heliotropic movements. At the final stage of floral development, the apex of the sunflower stops following the sun and acquires a tendency to turn

towards the East when it has grown bigger, becoming more attractive to pollinizers for reproduction and the start of a new life cycle<sup>23</sup>.

A Brazilian song<sup>24</sup> makes an analogy between people and sunflowers using heliotropism as a natural search for guidance, a sense for life, as shown in the following translation:

When I no longer know the way  
And all I do is follow my heart  
Then I turn away  
And face the sun  
When I no longer know the way  
And all I do is follow my heart  
It's by instinct  
That I find the light, I'm a sunflower<sup>24</sup>.

Throughout life, it is important that people enjoy every phase of it, overcoming obstacles and conflicts inherent to each cycle, tracing a path towards supreme happiness. Aging happens throughout an individual's life. During this process, physiological reserves diminish, and they face a greater risk of becoming ill or generally losing their intrinsic ability, that is, both physical and mental abilities, culminating in death<sup>25</sup>.

The book "The sun and her flowers"<sup>26</sup> by Rupī Kaur is divided into the following parts: wilting, falling, rooting, rising, and blooming, and presents the poem "Sunflowers":

despite knowing  
they won't be here for long  
they still choose to live  
their brightest lives<sup>26</sup>.

Vincent van Gogh, the Dutch painter, produced a series of paintings titled "Sunflowers" from 1887 to 1889, interpreted as a renewal of life, the continuous cycles of living and dying. The last years of the artist were marked by mental instability, and after his death, the sunflower represented love and loss, a golden tribute to the painter<sup>27</sup>.

Just like flowers, human beings also experience transformations across time, from the moment they are born to the moment they die. However, a cancer diagnosis, for instance, may happen at any time and interrupt aging. People share the journey from diagnosis to treatment, dealing with side effects and legal, psychosocial, clinical, and financial consequences, or they may develop another primary or secondary cancer after the initial diagnosis.<sup>28</sup> Just like in old age, the process of becoming ill puts human beings more in touch with finitude, especially the elderly. Having the sunflower as a symbol represents choosing to

live each phase of life, even if it is the closing chapter of a cycle, a transformation to a restart.

In four of the analyzed logos, the sunflower is depicted dotting the letter "i" (logo 1 and 2) or around the letter "o" in the word hospice or the institution name (logo 3 and 4). The tittle, the little rounded dot over the i, appeared in the 16th century, when Gothic characters were adapted and two i's together (II) were confused with a "u". Thus, the expression "dot the i's (and cross the r's)" means straighten things out, clarify something<sup>29</sup>. The tittle on the "i" also means discovery, revelation, or unveiling of the purpose of hospices. The letter "o", on the other hand, is a circle used to outline the sunflower's middle. The circle is usually identified as a symbol for the womb<sup>30</sup>. A series of beliefs, values, and myths are attributed to the womb, a female organ culturally associated with fertility, creativity, and renewal, which can also symbolize a process of transformation and restart<sup>30</sup>. By using such logos, those hospices convey an idea of returning to the womb's integral care as the right choice of destination.

### Sunflower as an intention of care

Palliative care offers quality of life and dignified care and diminishes the unnecessary use of healthcare services<sup>19</sup>. Translated into active care that involves the whole individual, such care should be initiated in association with adequate treatment to change the course of the disease, becoming more relevant as healing approaches become less effective<sup>19,31,32</sup>.

Among the analyzed logos, the words "care", "compassion", and "dignity" appear alongside the institution's name, in addition to messages like: "your story matters", "where people come to live", "caring for the local population", "to alleviate often... But to comfort always" and "shedding a ray of light on patients with cancer", predominantly written in green, blue, and yellow. Those messages composed with sunflower depictions contextualize the approach and principles of palliative care<sup>19,31,32</sup>.

The color green refers to tranquility and freshness. It reflects the realm of plants, of life rising and bringing back hope. Green presents a natural duality that preserves a complex character: green like the sprouting plant filled with life, and green as the moldy death; endings and beginnings representing nature<sup>18</sup>.

Blue is a deep color, attributed with the most therapeutic healing properties. It relaxes the whole body, regulates the harmonious development of organic structures, produces a soothing, refreshing, astringent, absorbing, and analgesic effect. It has an intense purifying action that cleanses the impurities of the body, representing care<sup>14,33</sup>.



Yellow is a warm, active, effusive, and ardent color. It brings a feeling of protection and justice, pushing away fear. The sun rays, crossing the blue sky, manifest the power of divinities from Beyond. Thus, yellow refers to gold and sunlight, which can mean eternity, transfiguration, and maturity<sup>18,33-35</sup>.

In eight logos, the sunflower is depicted close to the hospice name, more frequently on the left side (in six of them), which is related to the fact that sunflowers permanently orient themselves East at the end of their lives, that is, they keep a position in which their middle and flower are positioned towards where the sun rises, symbolizing the hospice as renewal, hope, and restart. This is a reminder of how important it is to live every day fully, with strength and hope, just like the comfort and compassionate care offered by hospices.

Logo 5 has two green leaves that accommodate the sunflower with its yellow petals and a dotted middle representing a grid of seeds. Based on human care, increasingly more technological, the leaves can be interpreted as hands that support the patient and their relatives, represented by the little dots at the center of care, surrounded by palliative care that offers relief and comfort, like the yellow petals that transfer solar energy to the seeds. In Ireland, Hospice Sunflower Days<sup>36</sup> are hosted twice a year, when products are sold to raise donations for voluntary and home care palliative care services. In the United Kingdom, the Go Yellow campaign during Hospice Care Week is a way of showing support and raising funds for hospices. In Malta, there is the Sunflower Campaign, another incentive to raise donations for hospices. Thus, care involves people and refers to the compassion of volunteer work.

Another logo with a sunflower next to the hospice name (logo 6) has petals shaped like a yellow crown with a brown heart in the flower's middle. The message below the name says, "where people come to live", in analogy with the new home and the heart, showing this to be a safe place to live, filled with affection. Logo 7 features a house in place of the sunflower's middle part, also referring to the home care offered in the hospice model, representing the idea of a safe and protected home. Logo 8 follows the same perspective, catering to the home care model. Thus, the hospice is seen as a place for sheltering and support, not about bodies and medical machines, but about people with whom the hospice is involved and cares at this specific time in their lives, providing protection and safety.

In this sense, sunflowers in hospice logos present their deepest symbolic purposes as places for palliation and dignified death, focused on life and what is left to live.

## Sunflower as an element of spirituality

In the face of death, sunflowers are a metaphor for the human soul seeking light and spiritual connection. In Christianity, this flower symbolizes the soul's spiritual perfection, referring to the idea of heaven and childhood. The sunflower signifies the love of God for a faithful soul, being therefore associated with prayer and monastic life. The sunflower was a perfect symbol for religious beliefs as it always turns towards the light, in analogy with the human soul that seeks the light of faith and profound spiritual connection. According to *A Dictionary of Symbols*<sup>18</sup>:

The property of constantly moving to follow the sun symbolizes the attitude of the lover, the soul, who continuously turns their gaze and thought to their beloved, the perfection always guided to a contemplative and unitive presence<sup>18</sup>.

Considering the searched logos and powerful symbolisms mentioned, it is worth highlighting the presence of the sunflower in logos 9 and 10. These logos translate the light and energy of the star with the pride the flower gains in growing. The light that shines in the darkness may be connected to the Christian quote in which Jesus says, "I am the light of the world", giving meaning to the hospice as a place where darkness and fear are dissipated by the belief in the existence of something mighty.

Logo 11, on the other hand, shows a dove that seems to carry a sunflower, which could also be interpreted as the sun setting on the horizon, as in logo 12. The dove is a symbol whose origins date back to the Old Testament when it returns to Noah's Ark holding an olive branch, signaling the end of the flood, becoming universally recognized as the symbol of peace and hope, good life after the deluge<sup>2</sup>. This image reflects the hospice philosophy of a good death, like a safe flight, and life after death, now at peace and free of disease. Moreover, the sunflower bids farewell like a setting sun at the end of the day, closing a cycle. However, the sun implies hope, that is, light amidst the darkness. This hope and good vibrations are transmitted by the sunflower, which in its yellow color indicates warmth and symbolizes the sun's energy, as in logo 13, with the natural flower on the right side of the hospice name.

Three other logos (14, 15, and 16) depict the sunflower in yellow only. Logo 14 highlights the radiated shape of the flower, much allusive to the sun and its symbol of light, strength, energy, symbolizing eternity, transfiguration, and maturity. Logo 15 features only the yellow petals



arranged in a circle resembling a sunflower that is losing its petals in a continuous movement that symbolizes losses as the disease and life progress, representing changes in the natural cycle of life and death, from a farewell to a restart. Finally, logo 16 depicts the sunflower with a dotted middle, highlighting its circular shape, forming, with the stem and roots, a continuity line, as care should be, associated with strength and fertility, for transfiguration and restart.

That way, the sunflower can also be associated with notions of finality, life and death cycles, and eternal return. Guardalupe<sup>37</sup> identified in the “A morte dos girassóis” (The death of sunflowers), a text by Brazilian author Caio Fernando Abreu<sup>38</sup>, aspects related to death seen as a new beginning, when the gardener, after the plant’s death, prepares a burial ritual in which, by throwing petal by petal back to earth, he bids farewell to the life he knows, at the same time seeing a possibility of restart, since the plant can return to life in the form of manure. The yellow flowers on logos allude to the idea that they sprout from strong roots under fertile ground. So, fertility is associated with the sunflower’s ability to generate life even after wilting and dying.

Many times, the sunflower is symbolized as an archetype figure of the soul, a spiritual center<sup>18</sup>. To Carl Jung<sup>15</sup>:

Archetypes appear in the practical experience: they are at the same time image and emotion, and we can only refer to archetypes when these two aspects are presented simultaneously. When there is only an image, it equals a description of little importance. But when loaded with emotion, the image gains numinosity (or psychic energy) and becomes dynamic, entailing several consequences<sup>15</sup>.

In this sense, it is possible to affirm that the diagnosis of a life-threatening disease is enough to make the individual face the process of symbolic death within their experience in the process of sickening. Such a characteristic is found in the work by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross<sup>14</sup> with terminal patients, in the analogy between the butterfly breaking the cocoon and the death of the human body, with the soul gaining life in the butterfly’s new flight. This transformation in the life of sick patients and their relatives is assisted by palliative care<sup>14</sup>.

Similar to butterflies, the sunflower is associated with the soul archetype, suffering the changes of time, reaching maturity in adversities, and finding in palliative care the opportunity to start a new cycle. Here is the profound meaning expressed by hospice logos.

## CONCLUSION

Sunflowers in logos are a sign and symbol of palliation, more specifically of hospices, from the process of finding new meaning in death, to care for patients and their relatives, emphasizing life and living. The symbolism of the sunflower is related to the sun, as suggested by its name, color, and radiated shape of the flower, as well as its inclination towards the sun during growth. Sunflowers attract, enchant with their beauty, and irradiate energy. It is an explosion of vitality and strength, where the path is the light. The yellow color of this flower is connected to gold, a symbol of eternity and transfiguration.

Thus, the hospice, like a sunflower, reconnects patients and relatives to the profound cycle of life, in which the truth of death is for everyone and part of a cycle of growing, blooming, wilting, falling, and rooting once more. In its ability to offer palliative care, hospices and their actors promote an essential heliotropism, that is, they guide the peculiar movement of following the sun, seeking light, and walking away from shadows, like human beings in touch with their spirituality. The sunflower’s ability to generate life even after falling gives sense to its fertility and strength, affirming the maximum expression of a being-towards-death; a human being that fulfills all their possibilities in finitude.

Despite being a limited study that uses the analysis of 16 logos to generalize all hospices or society in general, the results can offer valuable elements to enrich the practice and perception of palliative care, especially in end-of-life care. Further research is needed to obtain better evidence, combining semiotic analysis with other qualitative or quantitative methods, like interviews with patients, relatives, professionals, hospice volunteers, and palliative care services, in addition to research with the general public to assess the perception of logos and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the theme.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

All the authors have substantially contributed to the study design, acquisition, analysis and interpretation of the data, wording, and critical review. They approved the final version for publication.

## DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

There is no conflict of interest to declare.

## FUNDING SOURCES

None.



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Recebido em 30/7/2024

Aprovado em 24/3/2025

Associate-editor: Mario Jorge Sobreira da Silva. Orcid iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0477-8595>  
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