



TE PŪTAHI AKORANGA MŌ TE MATE WAREWARE



Workforce Development Session

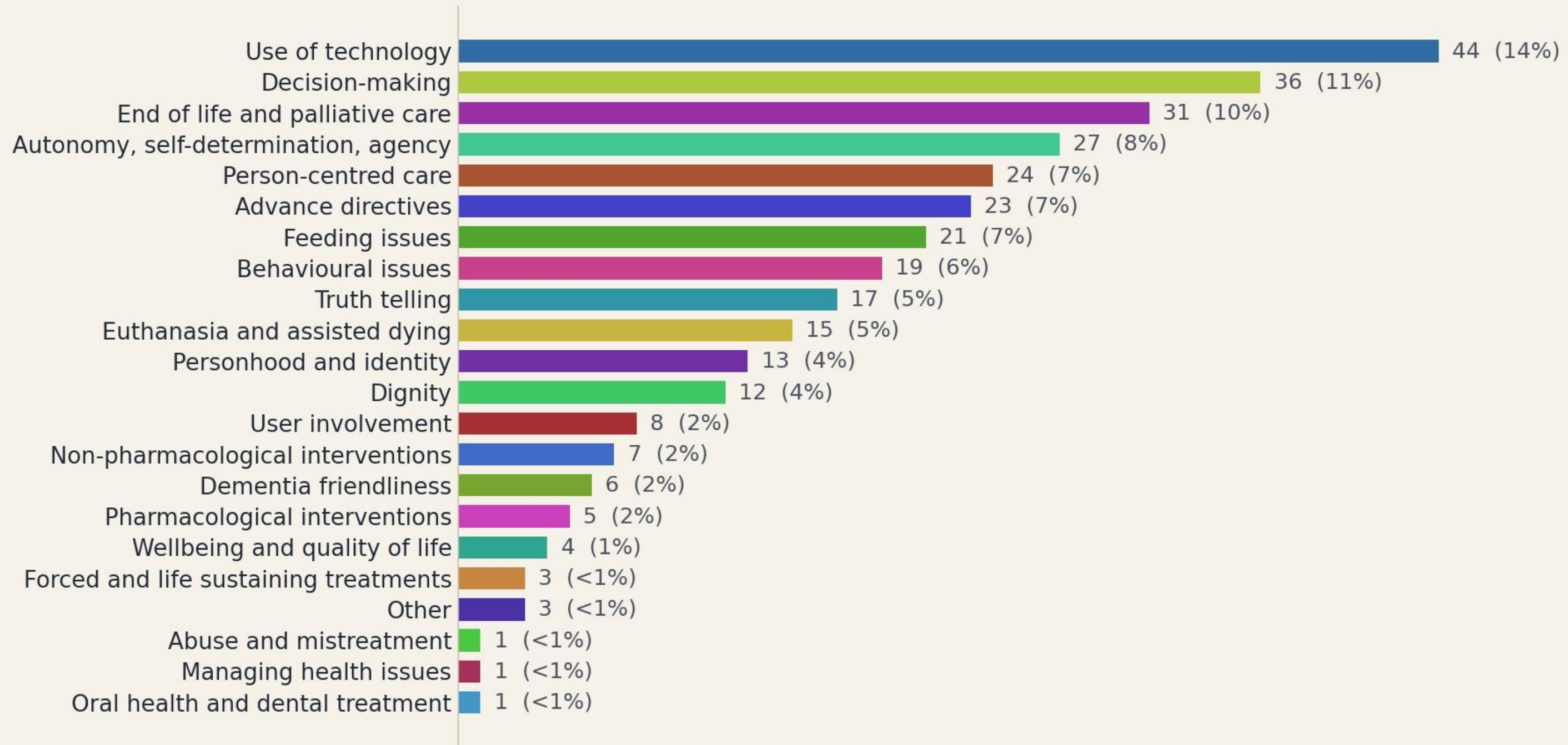
Ethics and Dementia

Ethics in Practice

Ethical dementia practice is the ongoing process of recognising, thinking through and responding to questions about what matters, what is right, whose interests are being served, and how the rights, dignity, relationships and wellbeing of a person living with dementia and their whānau can be upheld.

What are researchers asking about?

Main topic of 321 papers on ethics in dementia care



Source: Serrat et al. (2026), Neuroethics 19:29, Table 2. Excludes 67 papers on dementia care in general.

Ethical challenges

Dignity

Truth

Independence



Justice

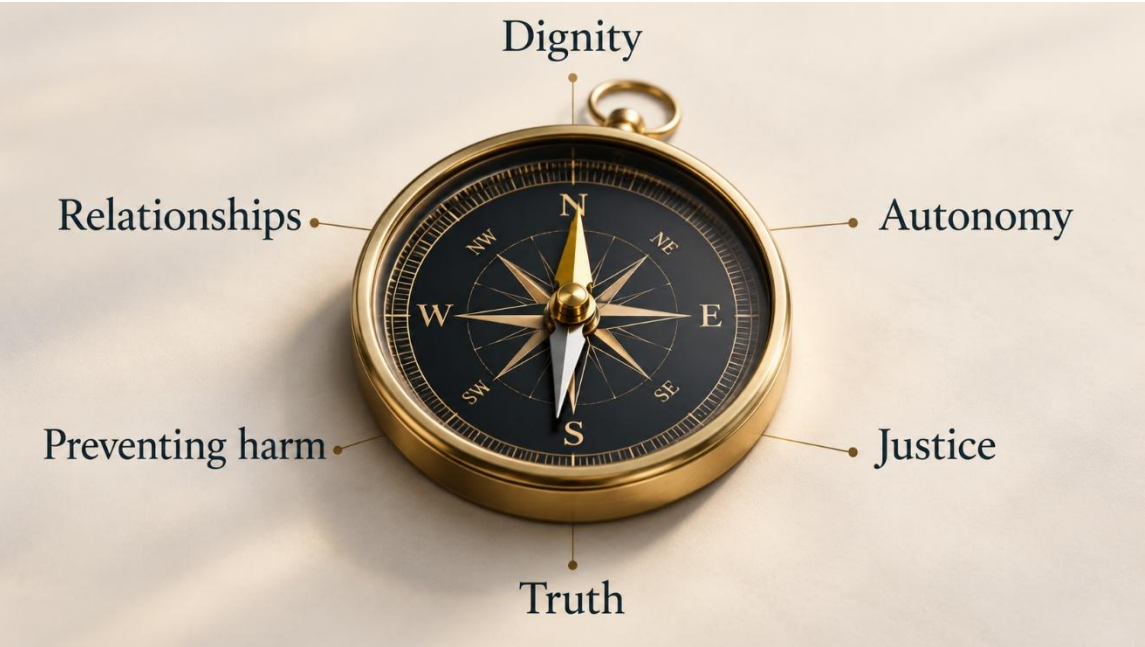
Harm

Safety

Ethics and Risk



Building a moral compass



Adapted from Tronto (1993) and Sevenhuijsen (1998), as applied to dementia care by Barnes, M. and Brannelly, T. (2008). Achieving care and social justice for people with dementia. Nursing Ethics, 15(3), 384 to 395.





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Ethics and Dementia

**How do you
respond?**

- Elsie is calling out for her mother, she sounds upset. Her mother died many years ago – how do you respond to this?

Telling the Truth

- e.g. Your Mum is dead

Possible outcomes:

- Unnecessary distress
- Person feels more isolated
- Conflict between person and member of staff
- Unmet needs

Distraction

- e.g. “Do you want a cuppa”

Possible outcomes:

- Distress has been ignored
- Person feels more isolated
- Feelings have no outlet
- A short term distraction
- Unmet needs

Lying

- e.g. “she’s just popped out”

Possible outcomes:

- False expectations
- Further confusion
- Mistrust of staff member
- Further distress
- Mistaken belief is enhanced
- Unmet needs

Is it ever
acceptable to
lie?

- Socially acceptable lies
- *Father Christmas*
- Lying to protect somebody's feelings
- *"Does my bum look big in this?"*
- *"If a white lie is the only way to make your loved one feel better in a particular situation, and isn't hurting anyone, then you're helping your loved one by entering his world instead of forcing reality upon him."*

MHF: An inquiry about truth and lying in dementia care (2017)

- MHF suggest there is a truth lie axis as part of a continuum.
- Recommends starts with truth telling except in situations where it is known it will cause distress.
- All responses to be underpinned with respect and kindness.



Truth lie axis (mental health foundation 2017)

