Death is inevitable for all living beings (Haisfield-Wolfe, 1996) and, as healthcare providers, nurses play a principle role in the care of dying individuals and their families. Consequently, the care that nurses provide to terminal or dying patients may be affected by their own attitudes toward death (Rooda, Clements, & Jordan, 1999). According to Rooda et al., “Determinants of attitudes toward death and dying encompass not only cultural, societal, philosophical, and religious belief systems, but also personal and cognitive frameworks from which individual attitudes toward death and dying are formulated and interpreted” (p. 1683). Therefore, nurses’ personal feelings also may influence how they cope with dying patients.

The average life expectancy of Americans has increased dramatically since the early 1900s, from 49 years of age to 79 and 74 years of age for women and men, respectively. Census bureau projections for the United States estimate that by the year 2030, the older than 65 age group will double to approximately 70 million, with the fastest growth rate to occur in the older than 85 age group (e.g., nine million) (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging Related Statistics, 2000). According to the National Cancer Institute (n.d.) Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results (SEER) Cancer Statistics Review 1975–2001, more than half (57%) of the reported cases of cancer in the United States are among older adults, with the median age of death from cancer occurring at age 72. These statistics suggest that nurses will be responsible for the care of a larger population of dying patients in the future and, therefore, the need to be educated about death is warranted.

Thus, the aim of this pilot study was to replicate the findings from Rooda et al. (1999) to provide rationale for the development of proactive educational programs designed to improve the quality of care of dying patients and their families.

### Literature Review

A review of the research literature to determine what effect death education may have on working nurses’ attitudes toward care of dying patients revealed very few recently published...