

Paper 4b Summary: Educating, Training and Mentoring Nurses and Health Care Assistants in Palliative Care

Question

What resources are required to ensure adequate education, training and mentorship for nurses and health care assistants who provide palliative care?

Issue

There are many educational materials and ways of delivering education in palliative care. However, there isn't a lot of evidence showing how effective they are. The review looked for evidence to help with developing recommendations around how nurses and health care assistants (HCAs) should be trained in palliative care. This includes both formal training and on the job or other professional development opportunities.

This paper reviews the resources required to ensure adequate education, training, and mentorship for regulated nursing and unregulated healthcare assistants providing palliative care.

Review Findings

- Many of the reviews looked at by the authors concluded that better evaluation tools were needed in order to fully determine how effective different programs are.
- Canadian nurses can be certified in palliative care through the Canadian Nurses Association and nursing schools have resources available to assist with integrating palliative care into their undergraduate programs.
- The Ipsos poll indicates that Canadians overwhelmingly support nurses' certification and mandatory training in palliative care. However, specialty certification alone is not a viable strategy.
- High quality preparation for palliative care needs to take into account how the knowledge gained will be used within the care setting. It's also critical to think about where the care is going to be delivered, whether in a home, residential setting or acute care.
- Palliative care education works best when it is part of the basic and ongoing education of all nurses and HCAs.
- Training nurses and HCAs together shows promise, but appears to work best when it's partnered with education focused on the specific role of the provider.
- Simulation programs show promise in training people, but there is less evidence that online training is effective.
- The same workplace issues noted by the public are also described by nurses and HCAs as barriers to putting into practice what they learn. These include heavy workloads, poor symptom management, communication issues, few opportunities to discuss care, interpersonal tensions, and lack of personal support when coping with multiple deaths.
- Overall, Ipsos report shows that a majority of Canadians feel that nurses should have direct experience in palliative care, with screening for compassion and empathy.

Implications

1. Canada should set national standards around palliative care that apply to a range of disciplines. This would support the development and evaluation of education.
2. More needs to be known about the long term impact of educating nurses and HCAs in palliative care. The literature indicates that there are short term gains, but less is known about long term benefits and the impact on outcomes.
3. Evidence suggests that educating different disciplines together is most effective when it complements discipline-specific education.
4. Innovations such as simulation, online learning, informal workplace learning, and apprenticeships show promise for improving palliative education.
5. Effective palliative care education will address early support for those on a dying trajectory and a variety of life-limiting conditions. It also will adapt the knowledge to contexts of care.
6. Most critical, however, is that the workplace supports the application of the skills and knowledge learned through educational opportunities. Appropriate workloads, practice-support tools, and communication strategies are important.

Recommended Readings

[Pesut B, McLean T, Reimer-Kirkham S, Hartrick-Doane G, Hutchings D, Russell LB. Educating registered nursing and healthcare assistant students in community-based supportive care of older adults: A mixed methods study. Nurse Educ Today. 2015;35\(9\):e90-96.](#)

[Pesut B, Potter G, Stajduhar K, Sawatzky R, McLeod B, Drabot K. Palliative approach to education for rural nurses and health care workers: A mixed method study. International Journal of Palliative Nursing. 2015;21\(3\):142-151.](#)

[Stajduhar K. Chronic illness, palliative care, and the problematic nature of dying. Canadian Journal of Nursing Research. 2011;43\(3\):7-15.](#)