

Paper 5 Summary: National Strategic Frameworks and Plans for Palliative Care

Question

What have strategic frameworks and plans accomplished for palliative care when adopted by countries?

Summary

In 2014, the World Health Organization (WHO) called on members to develop and implement policies to ensure evidenced-based, effective and equitable palliative care is integrated into national health services as an element of the continuum of care. This paper discusses barriers that need to be overcome to achieve universal access to high quality palliative care. It also reviews published national strategies and frameworks to promote palliative care, examines key aspects linked to successful outcomes, and makes recommendations for Canada.

This paper reviews barriers to accessing quality palliative care, looks at strategies and frameworks implemented in other countries and makes recommendations for

Evidence from a number of countries similar to Canada suggest that national strategies can ensure better access to high quality palliative care in a fiscally responsible manner. They appear more successful when clinicians, educators, researchers, service providers, advocates and policy makers are all involved in the strategy development, when governments are responsible for implementation and funding, and when milestones are established and regular audit of progress to these milestones are established.

Review Findings

- Barriers to quality palliative care include misperceptions of what it involves, a lack of professionals trained in providing palliative care, and a lack of evidence and care delivery models.
- Medical research still stems from a view that symptoms and suffering are only of interest as a pathway to diagnosis. Once the diagnosis is made and treatment given, the symptoms are supposed to go away. This doesn't take into account diseases which can't be cured or only partially managed or where the treatment itself causes distress and disability.
- Australia, Ireland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom have comprehensive national strategies. While not wholly successful, these countries are succeeding in improving access and quality.
- The early involvement of policy makers into strategy development is important as is an emphasis on developing a national system of quality reporting. Regular reporting and planned audits seem effective in ensuring progress.

Implications

1. There are international models that Canada can look to in developing its own national framework to improve access and quality of palliative care.

2. Governments need to commit to the WHO's resolution of universal access to palliative and invest in it on a sustained and substantial basis.
3. Significant investments need to be made to:
 - a. Increase public awareness of the appropriate role palliative care can play in the setting of serious illness
 - b. Develop an adequate workforce by enhancing undergraduate and graduate medical, nursing, and social work training to develop specialist and non-specialist palliative care professionals. Continuing education also needs to be provided to health care professionals already in practice who never learned these skills in their training.
 - c. Increase existing palliative care programmatic capacity, develop new models of care to address the need for palliative care at all levels (primary through tertiary) in the community, nursing homes, and rural areas.
 - d. Increase federal and provincial funding for palliative care research to ensure an adequate evidence base exists to support the provision of high quality palliative care.

Recommended Readings

[Palliative Care Australia. Standards for Providing Quality Palliative Care for all Australians. Deakin West2005.](#)

[Ministry of Health. The New Zealand Palliative Care Strategy. Wellington2001.](#)