

“It’s Not All Doom and Gloom”: Perceptions of Medical Students Talking to Hospice Patients

Presented by: Heng Liu, 4th-year pharmacy student, August 27, 2013

Reference: Gadoud A, Adcock Y, Jones L, Koon S, Johnson M. “It’s Not All Doom and Gloom”: Perceptions of Medical Students Talking to Hospice Patients. JOURNAL OF PALLIATIVE MEDICINE. (2013, Aug 12). Volume 16, Number 9, 2013

Abstract

Background: End-of-life care has become a priority in medical education internationally. A previous study of hospice patients and staff regarding medical students teaching in a hospice showed positive responses from patients and hospice staff. However concern was expressed by some staff regarding medical students’ welfare, contributing to gatekeeping by professionals. Studies have shown that medical students feel underprepared to care for the dying by the time they qualify.

Objective: The study’s objective was to explore in more detail the views and experience of medical students who had spoken with patients during their hospice placement.

Design: This was a qualitative study.

Setting/Subjects: The study was carried out with 14 Hull York Medical School (HYMS) students who had responded in an electronic survey that they had spoken with patients during their hospice placement.

Measurement: Semistructured interviews provided the study’s data.

Results: Although students expressed some anxieties prior to their hospice visit about meeting patients who were near the end of life, they felt that the overall experience, and the time spent with patients in particular, provided valuable learning about palliative care and preparation for caring for dying patients.

Conclusions: We would encourage staff to not be overprotective but to support students to take every opportunity to meet with patients in a hospice.

Strengths

1. Raises important issues regarding student education/exposure to palliative care
2. Students felt that they were better prepared for future interactions with palliative patients (Future reference => prospective interviews on how these encounters impacted these students when out in practice)

Weaknesses

1. Only 14 students from 1 medical school in the UK (self-selected) – can’t generalize all medical students (“data saturation?”).
2. Only students that had seen a patient were interviewed – students with negative experiences/fears/concerns that were not alleviated by the placement may have not volunteered to take part in the study (interested group)

Relevance to Palliative Care

Currently, palliative care is an underrepresented area of health professional education and exposure. Students who rotate on palliative units can use the opportunity to not only meet with patients but also learn how to care for and interact with a palliative patient. The experience can be applied to future practice involving this patient population. Further efforts are needed by health professional faculties to better integrate palliative care into their