

Journal Watch

Improved Competence after a Palliative Care Course for Internal Medicine Residents

Prepared by: Elaheh M. Ahmadi, FM resident PGY2, Tertiary Palliative Care Unit 43, Grey Nuns Community Hospital Aug.5, 2009

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ABSTRACT

Residents report that they received inadequate teaching in palliative care and low levels of comfort and skills when taking care of dying patients. This study describes the effects of a problem-based palliative care course on perceived competence and knowledge in a representative Dutch cohort of residents in internal medicine. Before and after the course, they carried out a questionnaire survey and knowledge test in 91 residents. The results showed that many residents felt they had limited competence or were incompetent when taking care of patients in the palliative care phase. This was particularly true with respect to communication concerning euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide or hastened death. Participants reported that they received inadequate training in palliative care and believed that specific education would make them feel more competent. The number of times that residents were engaged in palliative care situations and the years of clinical experience had a positive influence on perceived competence. Participating in the course improved perceived competence and knowledge in palliative care. No correlation was found between perceived competence and knowledge of palliative care.

Strengths:

- This study provides a good review of multiple factors which determine the level of perceived competence of residents dealing with end of life care.
- The authors designed different questionnaires and the knowledge test to assess participants before and after training course. The results were compared with the second study which was done several years after the first study which strengthens the findings.
- It offers an enhanced understanding of the effect of palliative care educational program on the level of perceived competence of residents or their knowledge in palliative care.

Weaknesses:

- Measurement tools for perceived competence of residents which were designed by authors were not standardized. Therefore it is difficult to compare the results with those of other studies.
- The primary focus was on Int. Med residents with over 3 years of work experience. The results may not be relevant to other residents.

Relevance to Palliative Care:

- Many residents feel limitedly competent or even incompetent when taking care of patients in the palliative phase of their life. This study shows that a problem- and experience-based education course with the emphasis on dealing with end of life care may provide a good way to improve the residents' education in palliative care.