

Journal Watch

A Method of Defining and Estimating the Palliative Care Population.

McNamara B, Rosenwax LK, Holman DJ. J Pain & Symptom Manage 2006; 32(1):5-12.

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Abstract

Palliative care research is challenged by a disagreement as to what palliative care is, when it should be offered and what conditions warrant specialized palliative care services. These challenges become evident when we used a population-based data linkage to evaluate the delivery of palliative care services in Western Australia. This paper describes the development of a conceptual framework to provide minimal, mid-range, and maximal estimates of a palliative care population. The estimates include nonmalignant conditions; realistically restrict the number and types of conditions; and propose a time frame over which specialized services can be offered. In defining a palliative care population for the purpose of research, development of an estimation method simultaneously addressed the rhetoric of palliative care with the restrictions inherent in both population-based research and service delivery. When applied to a population, the 10 conditions of the minimal estimate provide an acceptable guide to future research and practice.

Comments

Strengths/uniqueness:

This article provides a framework to estimating, through the use of multiple databases linked together, the population that can potentially benefit from Palliative Care services, taking in consideration their needs rather than their diagnosis. Key stakeholders' involvement in the process ensured comprehensiveness in this estimation.

Weaknesses:

The design of the study (retrospective) and the missed data that this conveys. As well, relying on health records that may only partially reflect reality (eg: the cause of death stated may be the clinician's impression rather than reality) can introduce bias in the calculations.

Relevance to Palliative Care:

This model can provide assistance to health care administrators and those trying to extend the provision of Palliative Care services to other groups beyond cancer patients. It will assist in calculating the target population, which will allow for realistic planning of the resources needed and the economic burden of this service delivery in the health care budget.

