

Community Pharmacists' Attitudes toward Palliative Care: An Australian National Survey

Authors: O'Connor MO, Hewitt LY, Tuffin PH.

Presentor: Braiden Hellec, BSc Pharm., PharmD Cand on Unit 43, GNCH, April 21st, 2015.
J Palliat Med. 2013 Dec 16(12):1575-81.

Abstract:

BACKGROUND: Pharmacists are among the most accessible health care professionals in the community, yet are often not involved in community palliative care teams.

OBJECTIVE: We investigated community pharmacists' attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and knowledge about palliative care as a first step towards determining how best to facilitate the inclusion of community pharmacists on the palliative care team.

METHOD: A cross-sectional descriptive survey design was used.

SUBJECTS: Community pharmacists around Australia were invited to participate; 250 completed surveys were returned.

MEASUREMENTS: A survey was constructed to measure pharmacists' knowledge and experience, emotions and beliefs about palliative care.

RESULTS: Pharmacists were generally positive about providing services and supports for palliative care patients, yet they also reported negative beliefs and emotions about palliative care. In addition, pharmacists had good knowledge of some aspects of palliative care, but misconceptions about other aspects. Pharmacists' beliefs and knowledge about palliative care predicted--and therefore underpinned--a positive attitude towards palliative care and the provision of services and supports for palliative care patients.

CONCLUSION: The results provide evidence that pharmacists need training and support to facilitate their involvement in providing services and supports for palliative care patients, and highlight areas that training and support initiatives should focus on.

Strengths:

Used a multifaceted approach to understanding community pharmacists' beliefs and knowledge regarding palliative care (5 part survey).

Sample size was fairly large and represented all states/territories in Australia.

Pharmacists were allowed to respond with unsure in the true and false component of the survey (this allowed pharmacists to admit a lack of knowledge as opposed to guessing).

Weaknesses:

Some of the true/false statements were either difficult to interpret or of questionable importance to the management of palliative care patients.

Difficult to know if study results are generalizable to the Canadian pharmacy/palliative care context.

Survey methodology most likely selects individuals who have a baseline interest in palliative care.

Although community pharmacists were able to personalize responses about beliefs it would have been enlightening to have a focus group to provide quotes particularly on education needs.

Relevance to Palliative Care: This study illustrates that in the context of community pharmacy there is for the most part a strong desire to provide palliative care services but additionally a lack of knowledge regarding the treatment of these patients. With this in mind it is reasonable to think that with the service currently available via many community pharmacies (medication delivery, medication reviews, home visits) and the accessibility of these services, that community pharmacists could be a potentially valuable untapped resource for the treatment of community-dwelling palliative care patients. To adequately provide these services community pharmacists will likely require additional training.