

Journal Watch – Administration – May 2018

Article:

Differential effects of early palliative care based on the age and sex of patients with advanced cancer from a randomized controlled trial

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Review:

Strengths: This study demonstrated effects of early palliative care for patients varies depends on patients' demographics with randomized controlled trial.

Weaknesses: This research paper is based on secondary analysis of subgroups previously collected for another research paper. It faces similar problems like other secondary analyses that p value, due to sample of size of original study design, is often insignificant, namely, p value greater than 0.05. Furthermore, some key features of the subgroups were not clearly noted in the paper. For example, for “younger” and “older patients”, the only information provided is the cut-off of age 65 but lacking information of average of median age of each group; the stages of cancer of patients can also impact the measured outcomes, but stages of cancer were not mentioned in the study. Lastly, measurement of coping skill (avoidant coping versus active coping) may be statistically significant but may not be clinically significant if it does not impact the patients' quality or life or mood.

Relevance to Palliative Care: Early palliative care had shown benefit to patients in previous studies. This study, although with limited significant outcomes, demonstrated that the benefits differ dependent on patient demographics. Further research to study what are and are not beneficial to different palliative care patients would be valuable in shaping individualized care.