

Publication

General practitioners' attitudes towards essential competencies in end-of-life care : a cross-sectional survey

JournalArticle (Originalarbeit in einer wissenschaftlichen Zeitschrift)

ID 3768442

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Year 2017

Title General practitioners' attitudes towards essential competencies in end-of-life care : a cross-sectional survey

Journal PLoS ONE

Volume 12

Number 2

Pages / Article-Number e0170168

Mesh terms Attitude of Health Personnel; Clinical Competence; Cross-Sectional Studies; Disease Management; Female; General Practitioners, standards; Humans; Male; Palliative Care; Referral and Consultation; Risk Factors; Surveys and Questionnaires; Switzerland; Terminal Care, standards; Terminally Ill

Identifying essential competencies in end-of-life care, as well as general practitioners' (GPs) confidence in these competencies, is essential to guide training and quality improvement efforts in this domain.; To determine which competencies in end-of-life care are considered important by GPs, to assess GPs' confidence in these competencies in a European context and their reasons to refer terminally ill patients to a specialist.; Cross-sectional postal survey involving a stratified random sample of 2000 GPs in Switzerland in 2014.; Survey development was informed by a previous qualitative exploration of relevant end-of-life GP competencies. Main outcome measures were GPs' assessment of the importance of and confidence in 18 attributes of end-of-life care competencies, and reasons for transferring care of terminally-ill patients to a specialist. GP characteristics associated with main outcome measures were tested using multivariate regression models.; The response rate was 31%. Ninety-nine percent of GPs considered the recognition and treatment of pain as important, 86% felt confident about it. Few GPs felt confident in cultural (16%), spiritual (38%) and legal end-of-life competencies such as responding to patients seeking assisted suicide (35%) although more than half of the respondents regarded these competencies as important. Most frequent reasons to refer terminally ill patients to a specialist were lack of time (30%), better training of specialists (23%) and end-of-life care being incompatible with other duties (19%). In multiple regression analyses, confidence in end-of-life care was positively associated with GPs' age, practice size, home visits and palliative training.; GPs considered non-somatic competencies (such as spiritual, cultural, ethical and legal aspects) nearly as important as pain and symptom control. Yet, few GPs felt confident in these non-somatic competencies. These findings should inform training and quality improvement efforts in this domain, in particular for younger, less experienced GPs.

Publisher Public Library of Science

ISSN/ISBN 1932-6203

edoc-URL <http://edoc.unibas.ch/54654/>

Full Text on edoc No;

Digital Object Identifier DOI 10.1371/journal.pone.0170168

PubMed ID <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28146566>

ISI-Number WOS:000396131700015

Document type (ISI) Article