The contribution of undergraduate palliative care education: does it influence the clinical patient's care?


Abstract

Purpose of review

The aim of this 2-years systematic review is to understand how learner assessment and curriculum evaluation of education in palliative care is being undertaken and to examine whether current undergraduate education influences the clinical patient’s care.

Recent findings

Almost half of the 30 studies reviewed used a qualitative approach to evaluate learning experiences. Only three of them were controlled studies and a further one was a cohort study.

When students openly express themselves, they agree that there is ‘something’ deep as regards the core or the essence of medical practice or nursing. They feel that they become better professionals and better prepared for the patients, not only in terms of end of life care, but also as regards care, irrespective of the phase of the disease.

The inclusion of palliative care in undergraduate education is a way of providing knowledge, skill, and competences about palliative care (especially communication) and also improving attitudes toward caring in advanced disease and at the end of life. Different methods of experiential learning, even brief experiences, which bring students into close contact with palliative care clinical cases or patients, are providing better results.

Summary

From research studies, there is only indirect evidence that palliative care training at university leads to better clinical care of patients. In the future, long-term cohort or controlled studies might answer that question.