

Is Palliative Care a Perceived Need of Medical Post Graduate Students of Mumbai, India?

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Abstract

Introduction : Present health care in India relies on secondary prevention with less attention on palliative care. Knowledge, attitude and practices among palliative care does not seem to be uniformly distributed in India, more so in the second most populous state Maharashtra. Hence, a study was conducted among post graduate students of a medical college, Mumbai to assess the same.

Material and Methods : A cross sectional study was conducted amongst conveniently selected 100 final year post graduate students of clinical departments in a randomly selected medical college in Maharashtra. The data was collected through pre tested questionnaire from May 2019 to July 2019. It was entered in Microsoft excel and analyzed in percentages. Necessary permissions and written consent were obtained from the participants.

Results : All the participants 100 (100%) knew about palliative care. Forty (40%) were aware about palliative care needs of the patients like pain relief, spiritual, psychosocial care but none of them (0%) were aware that it helps to reduce financial hardships. Only 19 (19%) of participants were aware that palliative care starts when the patient is diagnosed with chronic illness. Eighty (80%) participants said that they would advise palliative care to chronically ill patients but 70 (70%) did not know which hospitals provide palliative care. None of the participants received training in palliative care. Majority of participants 98 (98%) were interested in receiving training for palliative care.

Conclusions: Though post graduate students knew concept of palliative care, but did not have detailed knowledge including its practical application.

Keywords: Palliative Care, Knowledge, Attitude and Practices, Post Graduate Students Mumbai.

Introduction

Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families who are facing problems associated with life-threatening illnesses. It prevents and relieves suffering through the early identification, correct assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, whether physical, psychosocial or spiritual.¹ Palliative care is one of the developing speciality for chronic medical and surgical illnesses

. Though it is perceived as care for the dying, it should begin when the patient is diagnosed with a chronic illness.

The majority of adults in need of palliative care have chronic diseases like cardiovascular diseases (38.5%), cancer (34%), chronic respiratory diseases (10.3%), AIDS (5.7%) and diabetes (4.6%) etc. Forty million people are in need of palliative care globally but 14% of them receive it at present.¹

Access to adequate pain relief among the patients suffering from cancer is less than 3% in our country.² In India 10 million patients require palliative care of which 1 million patients are from Maharashtra.³

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Growing demand for palliative care shows that health professionals are expected to provide palliative care as a part of their practice. Several initiatives are under way to promote palliative care principles and practice in healthcare training. The challenge is how to develop these skills in the face of increasing demand on our time. There should be capacity building in palliative care for the existing medical workforce of our country through continued medical education.

Worldwide there are studies about assessing palliative care awareness among health care providers including impact about its educational interventions, however there is limited published evidence about similar literature from India.^{4-12,13-18} There is a dearth of similar literature from Maharashtra, which is expected to bear higher burden of palliative care.¹⁹⁻²¹ Hence a study was conducted to assess the knowledge, attitude and practices about palliative care amongst the post graduate students of medical college in Mumbai.

Material and Methods

This was a cross sectional questionnaire based survey. Study area was a randomly selected medical college in Mumbai. Study participants included 100 final year post graduate students working in the clinical departments of the college who had been selected conveniently. Semi structured questionnaire consisting of a) Socio-demographic information b) Knowledge, Attitude and Practices was used. Questionnaire was pre-tested and validated by pilot study. Approval from institutions ethics committee and written valid informed consent from all participants was taken before enrolling them in study. The study included post graduate students who were willing to participate in the study and were available at the time of data collection period. Those who were not present at the time of data collection and were not willing to take part in the study were excluded. Data was collected from May 2019 to July 2019. It was entered Microsoft Excel and results were calculated in terms of percentages. Strict confidentiality was maintained during process of data collection and analysis.

Results

All the study participants were in the age group of 25-30 years with 59 males (59%) and 41 females (41%).

Knowledge:

Amongst the 100 post graduate students interviewed, majority 44 (44%) thought that palliative care provides relief from pain, distressing symptoms, support to live actively till death, spiritual and psychosocial care. While in addition to this 14 (14%) thought that palliative care also provides spiritual care and psychosocial care. Role of palliative care was limited to provision of relief from care, distressing symptoms as per 24 (24%) of the post graduate students. None (0%) thought that palliative care provides reduction in financial hardship. Around 59 (59%) of post graduate students said that palliative care is an approach that improves quality of life, 14 (14%) said it improves quality of life and needed in life threatening illness and 25 (25%) said it is needed only in life threatening illnesses. Two percent of the post graduate students did not respond.

Sixty (60%) said that palliative care begins when patient is critically ill. Twenty (20%) said it begins when patient is diagnosed with illness and another 20 (20%) of the participants said palliative care was needed for both after the time of diagnosis as well as in the later stage of the diseases.

Hospice was perceived as end of life care by 59 (59%) of the respondents while 41 (41%) said that it is palliative care itself. Palliative care as fundamental right was echoed by most of the 98 (98%) of the respondents while 2 (2%) did not answer this question.

Though majority of the post graduate students 70 (70%) had correctly said that palliative care was needed for both cancerous and non cancerous conditions, it was needed for only cancerous conditions was thought by 60 (60%) of the respondents and 10 (10%) thought that it was needed only for non cancerous conditions.

Most of the participants 80 (80%) were keen to advise palliative care to the chronically ill however 70% of them did not know about hospitals that provide palliative care. Majority of the participants 85 (85%) were not aware about names of the hospices. Only 39 (39%) of post graduate students knew that palliative care has started under public health system in Maharashtra.

Most 90 (90%) of post graduate students said that training for breaking bad news to the patients and their

relatives is very important. Eighty (80%) of post graduate students agreed they were confident about breaking bad news. None of the participants (0%) in our study knew other avenues along with palliative care which can be added to a chronically ill patient's treatment plan.

Majority of the participants 70(70%) were of opinion that lack of knowledge of palliative care was major barrier and 11(11%) perceived unavailability of standard clinical guidelines and protocols. Rest 19(19%) did not give their opinion.

Though 62(62%) of post graduate students said that they follow guidelines for pain management, however 78(78%) of the post graduate students had no idea about the ladder for pain control developed by World Health Organization.

None of the post graduate students (0%) had experience in providing palliative care to the patients. However 60(60 %) of the participants said that they were satisfied with their performance while dealing with terminally ill patients. Maximum post graduate students (90%) agreed that palliative care should be incorporated in undergraduate medical curriculum. All the post graduate students (100%) were interested in getting trained for palliative care.

Discussion

In our study, 44% of the postgraduate students had good knowledge of palliative care. In a study conducted in Nigeria, among medical interns in a tertiary care hospital respondents have poor knowledge about palliative care.⁶ In another study, 28(60.9%) doctors working in a tertiary teaching hospital in Nigeria, said that palliative care is about pain management while majority 40 (85.1%) thought that it is about active care of dying and 35 (72.9%) doctors thought that palliative care is needed for all dying patients.⁴ In a study conducted among undergraduate students in Oman medical college, 60.3% of the students indicated that palliative care was active care of the dying.⁸ A study conducted among doctors working in medical colleges across India, 480 doctors (74.0%) mentioned about pain control as the primary aim for palliative care management.¹⁷ In a study conducted in Pakistani doctors aims of palliative care were mentioned as pain control (45.7%), rehabilitation (30%) and counselling (18.5%) respectively.⁹ A study

was conducted in a tertiary government hospital in Pune among III-year undergraduate, nursing and physiotherapy students. Overall knowledge about palliative care was poor among three groups, though third year nursing students had a greater knowledge about various domains of palliative care than other two groups.²¹ Majority of medical interns (87.6%) had correctly defined palliative care in a study conducted elsewhere in India.¹⁹

In our study, 60% post graduate students said that palliative care begins when patient is critically ill. Only 19% said it begins when patient is diagnosed with illness, 20% agreed for both. In a study conducted in Manipal university in India amongst the undergraduate medical students, around 67.5% felt that all dying patients needed palliative care.¹⁸

In our study, 70(70%) said that palliative care is needed for both cancerous and non cancerous conditions. In a study conducted among medical undergraduate students in India, 80% and 52% thought that it was needed for metastatic cancers and for noncancerous conditions as well.²⁰ Similarly more number of medical undergraduate students 78.1% thought that palliative care was needed for cancers with uncontrollable pain as compared to 55% for end stage heart failure, in a study conducted elsewhere in India among medical undergraduate students.¹⁸ Whereas in a study conducted among doctors working in medical colleges across India, majority thought that cancer (85.2%), followed by stroke, (7.4%) and neurodegenerative diseases (3.7%) were the main diseases to call for palliative care.¹⁷

Awareness about hospices providing palliative care was 85 % in our study. In a study conducted in India, 77% of doctors were aware about hospice while 57.1% of Pakistani doctors stated that they have heard about the same.^{9,17}

In our study, 90 (90%) of post graduate students said that training for breaking bad news is essential. In similar study conducted in eastern India, 77% doctors working in government medical colleges thought that it was crucial to break bad news to the patient.¹⁷ In a study conducted in neighbouring country of India, 60% of the doctors agreed that bad news should be conveyed appropriately.⁹

In our study, 78% did not have idea about pain control ladder developed by WHO while 22% of doctors working in medical colleges in Eastern India knew correctly sequence of analgesia defined by WHO ladder of pain control.¹⁷ Awareness regarding the same was similar (39.8%) in the studies conducted in medical undergraduate students in Pakistan and Malaysia.^{7,10} Higher level of awareness about the same was seen among 50% interns in a tertiary health institution in Nigeria.⁶ In the studies conducted in India awareness about the ladder of pain control was higher in medical undergraduate students (90.8%)^{22,23}

In our study, 80% of residents agreed they were confident about breaking bad news, however their competency was not assessed. In the study conducted in Turkey, the competency in giving bad news was assessed in physicians, and 32 of the participants (34%) stated their competence as very good, 51 (54%) stated as good, and 12 (13%) stated as moderate.¹¹ About 60% of Pakistani doctors thought that they broke bad news properly to the patients; 59% were satisfied with their own performance while dealing with an incurable patient.⁹

In our study 62% of post graduate students followed guidelines for pain management but 0% received any training in palliative care. In a study conducted amongst the emergency medicine physicians in Turkey, most respondents (77%) reported getting no training in palliative care.¹⁹ (20%) of the physicians stated their competence in pain management as very good, 60 (63%) of them stated as good, and 16 (17%) of them stated as moderate.¹¹

In this study 0 % knew about other avenues along with palliative care which can be added to a chronically ill patients treatment plan. In a study conducted in Pakistani Doctors, majority (67.1%) were open to other forms of treatment apart from allopathy mainly in the form of spiritual (32.8%), herbal/hikmat (22.8%), homeopathy (20%), acupuncture (8.5%) while 15.7% did not mention other alternative treatment or left to the patients or family's discretion.⁹ In a study conducted in India, also similar number of doctors (62.9%) were open to other modalities of treatment mainly to the spiritual (25.9%), aroma therapy (5.55%), acupuncture (27.7%) etc.¹⁷

In our study, 98% of residents were interested in getting trained for palliative care. In a study conducted in Turkey, maximum participants (91%) agreed that special training is required to acquire palliative care skills, and 69% of emergency physicians wanted to get training on palliative care.¹¹

Conclusions

The findings of this study showed that though the post graduate medical students knew concept of palliative care, however there was a gap between awareness and practice about the same.

Recommendations

There is a need to emphasize on the provision of training on palliative care in the curriculum of post graduate students not only from clinical departments but also from non clinical departments. Also undergraduate medical students should be sensitized about need of palliative care through workshops. There should be continued medical education about recent advances in palliative care to the post graduate students after completion of studies.

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Declarations

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