

Journal Watch

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Full Reference: Kaasa S, Jensen Hjermstad M, Harvard Loge J. Methodological and structural challenges in palliative care research: How have we fared in the last decades? Palliat Medicine 2006; 29:727-34.

Abstract:

The heterogeneity of the palliative care population represents challenges to research methodology, including study design, informed consent (and ethical issues in general), assessment and classification of symptoms and signs, as well as practical issues in the clinic. The aim of this report is to describe and examine the status of palliative care research in Europe by means of a survey and a literature review. Only one European country, the UK, has taken a national initiative to stimulate and promote palliative care research through the supportive and palliative care collaboratives (SUPAC) in 2005. There are few European research groups in palliative care reaching a critical size, several countries do not have academic chairs in palliative care, and there is no clear trend that chairs are emerging in general. There is little public funding for palliative care research. Palliative care researchers need to compete on the 'open market' or rely on private foundations. There has been a steady increase in the number of abstracts for presentation at the EAPC Research Forums, from 200 in 2000, to 480 in 2006. The literature review indicated that the majority of publications are surveys and descriptive/observational studies, and few randomised, controlled, studies were published. In conclusion, the quality of research seems to be steadily increasing. There may be a need for larger multi-centre studies, and in order to perform such studies, national and international structures, encompassing research above the critical size, with a multi-disciplinary background including both basic scientists and clinicians is required.

Comments

Strengths/uniqueness:

Using surveys and journal reviews, this report provides some useful information on the progress of palliative care research. Although the focus is on Europe, there is some reference to research activity in other countries and useful comment for international relevance.

Weaknesses:

There are some shortcomings in the research methodology. The survey in particular was a small pilot.

Relevance to Palliative Care:

The discussion contains good suggestions to allow palliative care programs to benchmark their development of local research initiatives. The suggested ingredients for

developing sound research programs provide a firm base for local and national advocacy.