



The importance of quality indicators for evaluation of palliative care services

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Abstract

Palliative care is a complex of measures for improving the quality of life of people with a chronic progressive illness and their relatives. Lithuania is one of the major emerging economies of the Eastern Europe with inherent transformations in changing society. The increasing average future life expectancy, aging population, growing number of chronic non-communicable diseases and even the advancement of medical technology require a different approach from the health service providers towards palliative care services, the development of a completely new perspective towards the sick and dying, as well as practical provision of comprehensive and high-quality health care for the patient and his / her family until the dying day and care for the family during the period of mourning. Palliative care in Lithuania is an integral part of the national health care system with the developed palliative care strategy. However, the statistics on the incidence of palliative care services for patients suffering from severe incurable progressive diseases show that it is underappreciated and lacking funding as well as proper training, adequate education and information about palliative care for health care professionals and the public. Very few individual elements of palliative care exist and are attributable to the primary personal health care, i.e. family doctor's institution and nursing hospitals. Therapeutic medicine can be of limited help for patients with chronic progressive disease which makes it especially important to provide them with a better quality of life for as long as possible. It is common to assess the quality of palliative care services by interviewing the patients themselves and their relatives, i.e. based on subjective assessments. The main quality indicators are the adequate pain relief, proper staff communication and family support. When conducting patient surveys on changes in their quality of life and interviewing them about the quality of palliative care it is difficult and even impossible to ensure principles of patient confidentiality and anonymity. Analysis of palliative care services in Lithuania during 2015 - 2018. 2699 people received palliative care in 2015, 2916 people received it in 2017. Inpatient palliative care services in nursing hospitals are prevailing in the structure of palliative care services: 72.5% of all patients who received palliative care were treated in the inpatient hospital department in 2015 and 69.5% in 2017. Only 29.4% of all patients in 2015 and 33.4% of patients in 2017 received outpatient palliative care services, i.e. home and day care services. The volumes of inpatient palliative care services are constantly rising. The single reason behind this phenomenon is that patients find out about the palliative care too late, only at the terminal stage of the disease. A total of 750 patients who received palliative care were surveyed. Patients were interviewed on where the information about palliative care came from and when palliative care was initiated from the onset of the disease. 80.2% of patients and / or their relatives reported that they had learned about palliative care from their doctors, 5.4% found the information in the media, 10.6% heard about it from their acquaintances and 3.8% did not remember the source of information. No patient was aware of palliative care services at the onset of the disease and was not informed about the palliative care options.

Biography

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