

Effective model of integrated patient support in the last period of their lives

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The Slovenian Hospice Association is a voluntary, non-governmental, humanitarian organization that operates as a network of eleven regional committees throughout Slovenia. The association has 21 employees, 140 volunteers and implements 4 basic programs: Accompany of dying patients and their relatives, Mourning of adults, children and adolescents, and the Detabuization and Volunteering programs. The programs are intertwined, allowing for an integrated approach to the patient and his relatives.

14 professionals (social workers, BSc M.s., psychologists) coordinate 140 volunteers who perform an average of 12,800 volunteer hours per year. Professionals and volunteers annually accompany around 2,650 dying patients and bereaved relatives. Annually, the association conducts 50 trainings for professionals and 320 educational events on the topic of dying, death and grieving for the general public.

In twenty-five years, the Slovenian Hospice Association has developed an exceptional and effective model of integrated support for patients in the last period of their lives. It was founded on the initiative of doctor and oncologist Metka Klevišar. Through its programs, the association presented an important alternative to the closed health system, which developed very slowly in the field of palliative medicine in terms of integrated treatment of the patient.

The advocacy of a dying patient and the guarantee of the right to a dignified death is the fundamental mission of the society for 25 years.

In their work, professionals at the Slovenian Hospice Association still encounter a lack of knowledge of health professionals in the field of palliative approaches, which is reflected in the lack or inappropriate communication with the dying and their relatives and the lack of knowledge of their needs.

A positive approach in the development of palliative medicine the association sees in functioning pain therapy clinics, in the efforts of individual physicians to develop palliative medicine and in bringing together all public services and NGOs operating in this field.

In 2019, the association proposed to the Ministry of Health a research at the national level on the effects of the association's programs on the individual, the family and the wider society. It was based on the important role that the association plays in supporting dying patients and their relatives at the national level and on the results of the work that the association achieves on an annual basis. With its programs, the association meets the needs of patients, which patients still cannot meet within the existing public institutions in the field of health and social care.

We estimate that the association saved the state more than 3 million euros through voluntary work alone. Such an organized network, which includes educated active volunteers coordinated by professionals, represents an effective model for reaching as many users as possible, not only in cities but also in rural areas.

The association strives to use this model in the planning and implementation of national programs in the field of health and social care and to make the association's representatives more active in involving policy makers in their future participation.