

PUBLIC AWARENESS OF PALLIATIVE CARE IN NORTH-EASTERN SLOVENIA

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BACKGROUND. Palliative care is active comprehensive assistance given to patients with a progressed chronic untreatable illness and to their closest ones, during the patient's illness as well as in the grieving process of the patient's loved ones. Challenges in implementing palliative care are represented by the lack of knowledge of the field and frequent negative views on palliative care. Data on people's awareness and their expectations regarding palliative care are of great importance for further development in the field of palliative care. The purpose of the survey is to assess the awareness of the general public on palliative care in north-eastern Slovenia.

METHODS: A cross-sectional survey was conducted involving random individuals from north-eastern Slovenia, over 18 years of age. The survey was conducted in a period of time going from mid-July to the end of August 2019. A validated questionnaire composed of 18 questions was used and adjusted to the situation in Slovenia. The respondents could complete the questionnaire in electronic or paper form. Data was collected with the assistance of general medicine clinics in north-eastern Slovenia, which cooperate with the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Maribor. Descriptive statistics was applied as a result analysis method. The level of statistical significance was determined to be $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS. 525 complete questionnaires were included in the analysis. 356 women (67.8%) and 169 men (32.2%) participated in the survey. 56.8% of the respondents merely heard of palliative care ($p < 0.001$). The main objective of palliative care was recognised by 54.5% of the respondents ($p < 0.001$). The respondents agreed the most with palliative care in case of cancer ($p = 0.011$) and the least in case of HIV/AIDS ($p < 0.001$). 77.0% of the respondents agreed that patients requiring palliative care would want assistance in relieving pain and other symptoms the most ($p < 0.001$). 68.2% of the respondents wished to spend the final stages of their lives at home ($p < 0.001$). When comparing the Štajerska and the Pomurska regions we established that most residents of the Pomurska region claimed to have good knowledge of palliative care (35.5%/17.2%; $p < 0.001$), many of them would want assistance

in relieving mental distress (29.1%/20.0%; $p = 0.017$) and to a larger extent they wish to die at home (79.7%/66.1%; $p < 0.001$).

CONCLUSIONS. The obtained data of the survey provide an empirical basis that may represent a starting point for discussions about death, dying and advance planning of palliative care in society. Residents of north-eastern Slovenia have already heard about palliative care, however, they do not have in-depth knowledge of it. Those having experiences with palliative care of their closest ones, people employed in healthcare and women are most knowledgeable about palliative care. The results of the survey have shown that the majority of residents of north-eastern Slovenia wish to die at home. In order to raise awareness of palliative care, activities will have to be planned in the future with the aim of improving awareness.

Key words: palliative care, awareness, population