



Unshakable or Uncertain: Palliative Education Impact on Provider Confidence Levels

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INTRODUCTION

As the general population ages and develops increasingly complex medical needs, the demand for competent and confident palliative care providers will continue to grow. These providers play a critical role in delivering compassionate, patient-centered care. However, the nuances of this medical specialty—which include symptom management, communication skills, emotional support and advanced care planning—can be a source of uncertainty and stress for medical professionals. Improving provider confidence may be a critical element in improving patient care.

PURPOSE & AIMS

By observing how advanced education impacts palliative medicine providers' confidence levels in specialty topics, we can see where providers may or may not need more time for study. This helps establish where clinicians feel the most prepared, and what education topics may lay the foundation for professional growth and development.

METHODS

Following an hour-long didactic session that reviewed symptom management, participants received a 15-question true/false test reviewing concepts in palliative medicine. The test concluded with four questions reflecting provider confidence levels on a scale of 1 to 5 in the areas of: complex pain, nausea, psychosocial distress and symptoms at end of life. Participants were asked to define their role within the interdisciplinary team.

RESULTS

A total of 23 respondents participated in the survey. This included two physicians, 14 nurse practitioners and seven registered nurses. Participants were asked to rate their confidence levels on a scale of 1-5, with a 5 representing Definitely Confident, and 1 representing Definitely Not Confident. Providers reported varying confidence levels in each of the four areas of practice. Providers appeared most assured in their care of patients suffering from psychosocial distress, with an average rating of 3.74 out of 5. Participants reported a confidence scale of 3.65 out of 5 in symptom management at the end of life; 3.52 out of 5 in nausea management; and 3.26 out of 5 in management of complex pain.

CONCLUSIONS

In aggregate, the interdisciplinary team feels most confident in the management of psychosocial distress. Management of symptoms at the end of life was also a source of confidence for this team. However, specific symptoms including nausea and complex pain, were areas that providers felt the least confident.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Palliative medicine teams provide invaluable resources to patients with serious illness. Providers act as a source of emotional support, and a knowledge base for symptom management from the time of diagnosis. Potential educational opportunities can include didactic sessions, access to evidence-based guidelines for symptom management, and mentoring programs.

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Provider Confidence Levels Survey

Participants rated their confidence in specialty areas of care

