

Preparing future doctors for palliative care: views of course organisers

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Abstract

Background Effective training at medical school is essential to prepare new doctors to safely manage patients with palliative care (PC) and end of life care (EOLC) needs. The contribution of undergraduate PC course organisers is central but their collective views regarding role are unknown.

Objective To survey attitudes of PC course organisers regarding their course, organisation, the adequacy of training provided and level of personal satisfaction.

Methods An anonymised, multifactorial, web-based questionnaire was devised, tested, modified and then sent to lead PC course organisers at all UK medical schools.

Results Data were obtained from all 30 UK medical schools. Organisers agreed/strongly agreed (=agreed) that their PC course was highly rated by students (26, 87%). 25 (83%) agreed their course 'enabled misconceptions and fears about PC, death, dying and bereavement to be addressed', 'delivered quality PC training' (23, 77%), 'fulfilled General Medical Council requirements' (19, 63%), 'prepared students well to care for patients with PC/EOLC needs' (18, 60%) and 'enabled students to visit a hospice and see the role of doctors in caring for the dying' (17, 57%). Concerns were limited capacity to accommodate students (agreed 20, 66%) and variability in teaching according to location (15, 50%). Most agreed their institution recognised PC training as important (22, 73%), they felt supported by colleagues (21, 70%) and experienced cooperation between stakeholders (20, 67%). All agreed that PC training was essential for undergraduates, while 29 (97%) supported inclusion of a hospice visit in the curriculum. 27 agreed that their role was satisfying (90%), 3 disagreed (10%).

Conclusions Approximately two-thirds of organisers were generally positive about their PC course, institution and role. A minority expressed concerns; these may reflect suboptimal PC training at their medical school and poor preparation of new doctors.