

Palliative Care Education for Medical Students: a cross-sectional survey in all 282 medical schools of mainland China

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Abstract

Background

According to the 2015 Quality of Death Index, China ranks 71st in terms of the quality of palliative care in 80 countries. The lack of end-of-life care education has been identified as a key barrier to the improvement of the discipline. The aim of this study is to evaluate the status of end-of-life care education for medical students in mainland China.

Methods

A list of all medical schools was obtained from the website of the Ministry of Education. A telephone survey of associate deans for medical education at all 282 medical schools in mainland China was conducted in May 2019, following a standardized protocol. Telephone interviews focused on attitudes to end-of-life care teaching, and the extent and manner in which end-of-life care is incorporated into the curriculum. Schools which did not reply were contacted again after 1, 3 and 7 days. Ethical approval was obtained from Zhejiang University Research Ethics Committee.

Findings

Among the 282 medical schools, associate deans from 120 (42.5%) schools completed the interview; 53 (18.7%) schools refused to answer the questions related to end-of-life care. 92 (76.7%) associate deans regarded end-of-life care education as very important. But, only 11 (9.2%) provided specific teaching on end-of-life care, and this comprised just one lecture. One other dean said such a lecture was planned. A few schools (n=18) have integrated end-of-life education within required curricula, such as medical ethics. The main reason reported for not providing end-of-life care is that the medical curriculum dictated by the Ministry of Education does not require it.

Interpretation

A tiny minority of medical schools in mainland China provide any formal teaching about end-of-life care. Clearly, the government needs to include end-of-life care in the medical curriculum.

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Contributors

XY Z, GC Y, JC and TH contributed to the design of the study and the data analysis. GC Y, JH M and TH contributed to the writing and revision of the Abstract. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Declaration of interests

We declare no competing interests.

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