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, JHM 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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