

AWARENESS OF PALLIATIVE CARE AMONG PHYSICIANS AT A TERTIARY CARE HOSPITAL IN LAHORE: A SURVEY

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OBJECTIVE

Palliative care (PC) plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life of patients with life-limiting illnesses but the topic is under-researched in relation to awareness and its application by physicians in Pakistan. This research was done to evaluate the awareness of palliative care among physicians at a tertiary care hospital in Lahore.

METHODS

A cross-sectional survey was carried out at Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre, Lahore. Convenience sampling was used to fill out online structured questionnaire based on validated surveys and 184 physicians (residents, fellows, consultants, and medical officers) were sampled. Frequencies and percentages of responses were summarized by means of descriptive statistics.

RESULTS

Total 184 physicians participated, Internal Medicine (42.9%) and Residents (65.8%) being the largest groups. Most had knowledge of palliative care (96.2%) while 72.3% had experience caring for terminally ill patients. Pain control (42.4%) and end-of-life care (37.5%) were the most common reasons for referral. Despite high awareness, 65.2% reported insufficient knowledge to manage terminally ill patients. Lack of community awareness (53.3%) and inadequate knowledge (38.0%) were the main barriers. Community awareness programs (48.4%) and seminars (39.1%) were the most commonly suggested strategies for improvement.

TABLE 1. PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Designation	Frequency (n)	%
Residents	121	66
Fellows	38	20
Consultants	18	10
Medical Officers	7	4

TABLE 2. SPECIALTY OF PARTICIPANTS

Specialty	Frequency (n)	%
Internal Medicine	79	43
Medical Oncology	33	18
Surgical Oncology	32	17
Pediatric Oncology	21	11
Radiation Oncology	14	8
Anesthesia	5	3

TABLE 3. KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND PRACTICE (KAP) REGARDING PC (N = 184)

Question	Response	%
Knowledge about Palliative Care	Yes	96
	No	4
Exposure to Palliative Care Patients	Yes	92
	No	8
Involvement in Palliative Care of Terminally Ill Patients	Yes	72
	No	28
Reason for Consulting Palliative Care	Pain Control	42
	End of Life Care	37.5
	Comfort Care	20
	Respiratory Secretions	0.5
Conditions for which Palliative Care was considered	Oncology	92
	Chronic Liver Disease	4
	Chronic Kidney Disease	3
	Congestive Heart Failure	0.5
	Cerebrovascular Accident	0.5
Knowledge Sufficient to Deal with Terminally Ill Patients	Yes	35
	No	65
Barriers to Practicing Palliative Care	Lack of practice/awareness	53
	Lack of enough knowledge	38
	Resistance from patients	9
Measures to Improve Palliative Care Practice	Community Awareness	48
	Seminars / Workshops	39
	Literature / Resources	9
	Awareness Walks	4
Appropriate Time for Referral to Palliative Care	No further curative treatment	73
	At diagnosis	23
	During dying phase	4

CONCLUSION

Despite a high level of awareness and exposure to palliative care among physicians working in this tertiary hospital, the lack of involvement, satisfaction, and prompt referral remain. Such results are reflected in other low- and middle-income nations and indicate the necessity of systematic education, practical training, earlier incorporation of PC into clinical practice, and awareness in the community. These steps are essential in order to be able to get knowledge into practice and enhance patient-centered palliative care in Pakistan.

