



Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association

Association canadienne de soins palliatifs

Fact Sheet

Hospice Palliative Care in Canada

*At some time, in some way, we must all face the end of life. And most of us share a common hope – that when death comes to us or to a loved one, it will be peaceful and free of pain. We hope to face death surrounded by those we love, feeling safe, comfortable and cared for. **

The Growing Demand for Hospice Palliative Care in Canada

- Canada's population is aging: over the next 40 years demands for palliative care will dramatically increase
- Each year more than 220,000 Canadians die, with an estimated 160,000 needing palliative care
- Each death potentially affects the immediate well being of an average of five other people, or more than one million Canadians each year
- Hospice palliative care programs allow patients to gain more control over their lives, manage pain and symptoms more effectively and reduce the burden on informal caregivers such as family and friends

Access to Hospice Palliative Care Services in Canada

- Between 5% - 15% of Canadians have access to hospice palliative care services
- Canadians living in remote and rural areas, or those living with disabilities, have severely limited access to palliative care services
- Under health care restructuring, the number of institutionally-based palliative care beds has been cut and care has devolved to community-based agencies
- Government funding of community-based hospice palliative care has not increased proportionately, leaving a significant gap in the health care system
- Inadequate government support for hospice palliative care programs results in a significant additional burden on friends and family
- A recent poll indicated that 90% of Canadians wish to remain in their own homes during the final stages of life, yet only 6% of caregivers feel they can adequately care for their loved ones without hospice palliative care support
- 75% of deaths today still take place in hospitals and long-term care facilities
- Only two provinces cover the cost of medication for home-based care, leaving a significant gap in health care and increasing the financial burden on caregivers
- Billing schedules under provincial health plans discourage physicians from practicing palliative care by focusing on clinical procedures

Training and Education

- Canada has only 160 palliative care physicians, including those working full and part-time (Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians)
- Only seven of Canada's 16 medical colleges offer a palliative care certificate program. Lack of funding discourages other medical colleges from offering the program
- Much of Canada's end-of-life care is provided by family physicians, many of whom lack adequate training in pain management and other required skills

- Training is equally underfunded for other disciplines involved in hospice palliative care, including nurses, social workers, psychologists, and spiritual counselors

Research

- There is an acute need for research into more effective pain and symptom management, psychosocial aspects of palliative care, and effective methods of delivering palliative care services and programs in the health care system
- Palliative care research has been poorly supported in the past. A palliative care research strategy is required to ensure a coordinated approach to this issue
- The Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association (CHPCA) has produced the *Canadian Agenda for Research in Palliative Care*; report recommendations include the need to build research capacity in Canada by establishing more fellowships in palliative care for researchers in the early stages of their careers

The Role of Informal Caregivers

- With the devolution of care back to the community and the home, families are facing an increased burden to care for loved ones with little formal support
- Although the federal government recently committed to expanding Employment Insurance to allow for compassionate leave for caregivers, there is currently little or no job protection or income security for Canadians who must take time off work to care for a family member.

Funding for Hospice Palliative Care Programs

- Hospice palliative care programs rely disproportionately on charitable giving; two-thirds of the cost of programs is provided by private donors, restricting the size, scope and access of programs
- Only four provinces have designated palliative care as a core service under their provincial health plans. In other provinces, palliative care may be included in home care or other health service budgets, leaving it vulnerable to cutbacks

Raising Awareness

- Public awareness programs are critically important in helping Canadians face end-of-life issues and become aware of the current gaps in service
- The CHPCA has established the Quality End-of-Life Care Coalition, a group of 23 national associations and organizations with an interest in palliative care.
- The CHPCA and the Coalition support full implementation of the June 2000 Senate report *Quality End-of-Life Care: the Right of Every Canadian*
- Through its partnership with the GlaxoSmithKline Foundation, the CHPCA provides a toll-free national information line and other public education services.

Statistics are from *Quality End-Of-Life Care: The Right of Every Canadian*, Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, June 2000 and *Living Lessons – About Quality of Life for the Last Stages of Life*, GlaxoSmithKline and the CHPCA, 2001.

* *Living Lessons – About Quality of life for the last stages of life – GlaxoSmithKline and the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association (2001)*

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