

Knowledge and awareness of palliative medicine amongst students of a rural dental college in India

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To determine the current knowledge and awareness among undergraduate dental students in a rural dental college regarding palliative medicine. **Materials and Methods:** This cross-sectional observational study was conducted on students of a rural dental college located in western India. They were asked to fill a pre-designed questionnaire. The variables assessed were their knowledge and awareness towards palliative medicine and a dentist role in palliative team. **Results:** A total of 150 students participated. The male:female ratio was 1:2; mean age of respondent was 20.66 ± 1.01 years. On an average, 59.23% were correct and 40.67% were incorrect for knowledge about palliative medicine, while 81.55% were correct and 18.45% were incorrect regarding awareness about oral care in palliative medicine. **Conclusion:** Results indicate that students had good awareness and perception level about awareness of oral care in palliative treatment.

Key words: Palliative, Dental, Awareness, Hospice

INTRODUCTION

World Health Organization defines palliative care as the active total care of the patient whose disease is not responsive to curative treatment and the treatment should focus on improvement of quality of life instead of straining curative treatment approach.^[1] The goal of palliative treatment is achievement of the best possible quality of life for the patients and their families.^[2] Palliative care is an imperative need worldwide for people with cancer, human immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV) and other such advance life-threatening illness. Every hour, more than 60 patients die in India from cancer and a large number is in pain. Moreover, with a population of over a billion, spread over a vast geo-political mosaic, the reach and reliability of palliative care programs may appear staggering and insurmountable.^[3] In palliative medicine, an

interdisciplinary approach is inevitable and essential and the importance of dental care is often overlooked due to the omission of dentist as a member of palliative care team.^[1] Present study was designed to determine the knowledge and awareness for oral care in palliative care among the undergraduate students of rural dental college.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A cross-sectional observational study was conducted among the students of a rural dental college in western India. A total of 150 students voluntary participated in the study and subjects were fully informed about the design and purpose of the study. Of these students, 100 (66.67%) were female and 50 (33.33%) were males; with the male:female ratio of 1:2. Mean age of total respondent was 20.66 ± 1.01 years. It was 21.14 ± 1.04 years for males and 20.18 ± 1.15 years for females. The study finds the significant difference in terms of age in years of male and female patients ($P < 0.01$). A written informed consent was obtained from each participant and anonymity of the participants was maintained throughout the study. The data was collected on a pre-tested structured questionnaire distributed among these students in the classroom, and they were asked to fill the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 22 questions to assess the knowledge and awareness towards palliative medicine. The statistical tools like Z test of difference between two proportions mean and standard deviation (SD) values were employed.

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| Access this article online | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Quick Response Code: | Website: www.ijabmr.org |
|  | DOI: 10.4103/2229-516X.81981 |

Table 1: Results regarding the respondent's knowledge about palliative medicine

| Statements regarding knowledge | Correct (%) | Incorrect (%) |
|--|-------------|---------------|
| The first United States hospital-based palliative care programs began in the late 1980s | 31 | 69 |
| Palliative care and hospice care reflects the same | 49 | 51 |
| Palliative care is prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification, impeccable assessment and treatment | 50 | 50 |
| W.H.O. defines palliative care as active total care of patient whose disease is not responding to curative treatment | 73 | 27 |
| The first pan-European centre devoted to improving patient palliative care and end of life care was established in Trondheim, Norway in 2009 | 23 | 77 |
| Indian Association of palliative care was formed in 1994 | 35 | 65 |
| In palliative medicine interdisciplinary approach is required | 75 | 25 |
| Palliative care integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care | 56 | 44 |
| Caregivers, both family and volunteers, are crucial to the palliative care system | 80 | 20 |
| Opioids are the main analgesics used in advanced cancer pain | 45 | 55 |
| Palliative care affirms life and regards dying as a normal process | 94 | 6 |
| Palliative care uses a team approach to address the needs of patients and their families | 71 | 29 |
| Palliative care offers a support system to help the family cope | 88 | 12 |
| Average | 59.23 | 40.67 |

Table 2: Results regarding the respondent's awareness for oral care in palliative treatment

| Statements regarding awareness | Correct (%) | Incorrect (%) |
|---|-------------|---------------|
| Is dentist a part of palliative team? | 88 | 12 |
| Are oral symptoms common in palliative patients? | 95 | 5 |
| Most of the oral cavity diseases are opportunistic | 92 | 8 |
| Is Xerostomia the most common oral problem in palliative patients? | 95 | 5 |
| Routine examination of oral cavity is required in palliative patients | 94 | 6 |
| Cancer in advance stage make treatment prolonged and expensive | 68 | 32 |
| For treatment of choice of oral Candidiasis, is oral nystatin solution a good choice? | 95 | 5 |
| Alcohol-based mouthwashes should be avoided | 31 | 69 |
| Oral palliative treatment is must for HIV/ Cancer patients | 76 | 24 |
| Average | 81.55 | 18.45 |

RESULTS

After applying the Z test for difference between two sample proportions, there was a significant difference between knowledge of palliative medicine for all statements in regards to correct and incorrect (i.e., $P < 0.05$) [Table 1]. 59.23% were correct and 40.67% were incorrect for knowledge about palliative medicine. After applying Z test for difference between two sample proportions, there was a significant difference between awareness for oral care in palliative medicine for all statements in regards to correct and incorrect (i.e., $P < 0.05$), 81.55% were correct and 18.45% were incorrect for their knowledge about oral care in palliative treatment [Table 2].

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the present study, 75% students knew that in palliative care an interdisciplinary approach is required and 94% of

the participants believed that palliative care affirms life and regards dying as a normal process. A total of 88% of the students believe that palliative care offers a support system to help the family cope. In general, studies of students indicate that they have relatively a good level of knowledge about palliative medicine. Regarding awareness of students towards oral care in palliative treatment, the overall percentage of correct answer was 81.55. Almost 88% of students confirm that dentists are a part of palliative team and 95% of participants believe that oral symptoms are common in palliative patients. The overall awareness of students is high as per the knowledge regarding dental expression and its role in palliative treatment. This study was conducted among 150 undergraduate students only; therefore, one could argue that the findings are not necessarily a generalization of all the undergraduate students' knowledge and awareness about palliative medicine and dentist role in palliative team. Another drawback of the study was that the questionnaire used was not validated. None the less, it does serve as a point of reference for future research on this topic. Increased knowledge by all health care professionals and of palliative oral care would go a long way in providing relief, care and support to incurably ill patients and their families.

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How to cite this article: Saini R, Saini S, Sugandha RS. Knowledge and awareness of palliative medicine amongst students of a rural dental college in India. *Int J App Basic Med Res* 2011;1:48-9.

Source of Support: Nil. **Conflict of Interest:** None declared.