

The Perspective of Health Care Professionals of Pediatric Palliative Care

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Abstract : Background: Pediatric palliative care has been increasing, and the number of studies has focused on the age at which pediatric patient can be notified their terminal illness, pediatric advanced care planning (ACP) and palliative care. However, there is a lack of research on health professionals' perception. Aim: We aimed to investigate the perceptions of healthcare professionals about appropriate age disclosing terminal illness, awareness of ACP, and the relationship between ACP knowledge and the preference for palliative care for children. Methods: We administered nationwide questionnaires to 928 physicians from the 12 hospitals and the Korean Medical Association and 1,241 individuals of the general Korean population. We asked about the age at which the pediatric patients could be notified of their terminal illness, by 4 groups; 4 years old or older, 12 years old or older, 15 years old or older, or not. In addition, we surveyed the questionnaires about the knowledge of ACP of the medical staff, the preference of the pediatric hospice palliative care, aggressive treatment, and life-sustaining treatment preference. Results: In the appropriate age disclosing terminal illness, there were more respondents in the physicians than in the general population who thought that it was possible even at a younger age. Palliative care preference in pediatric patients who were expected to expire within months was higher when health care professionals had knowledge of ACPs compared to those without knowledge. The same results were obtained when deaths were expected within weeks or days. The age of the terminal status notification, the health care professionals who thought to be available at a lower age have a higher preference for palliative care and has less preference for aggressive treatment and life-sustaining treatment. Conclusion: Despite the importance of pediatric palliative care, our study confirmed that there is a difference in the preference of the health care professionals for pediatric palliative care according to the ACP knowledge of the medical staff or the appropriate age disclosing terminal illness. Future research should focus on strategies for inducing changes in perceptions of health care professionals and identifying other obstacles for the pediatric palliative care.

Keywords : pediatric palliative care, disclosing terminal illness, palliative care, advanced care planning

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