

Barriers for Appropriate Palliative Symptom Management: A Qualitative Research in Kazakhstan, a Medium-Income Transitional-Economy Country

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Abstract : Background: Palliative care substantially improves the quality of life of terminally-ill patients. Symptom control is one of the keystones in the management of patients in palliative care settings, lowering distress as well as improving the quality of life of patients with end-stage diseases. The most common symptoms causing significant distress for patients are pain, nausea and vomiting, increased respiratory secretions and mental health issues like depression. Aims are: 1. to identify best practices in symptom management in palliative patients in accordance with internationally approved guidelines and compare aforementioned with actual practices in Kazakhstan; to evaluate the criteria for assessing symptoms in terminally-ill patients, 2. to review the availability and utilization of pharmaceutical agents for pain control, management of excessive respiratory secretions, nausea, and vomiting, and delirium and 3. to develop recommendations for the systematic approach to end-of-life symptom management in Kazakhstan. Methods: The use of qualitative research methods together with systematic literature review have been employed to provide a rigorous research process to evaluate current approaches for symptom management of palliative patients in Kazakhstan. Qualitative methods include in-depth semi-structured interviews of the healthcare professionals involved in palliative care provision. Results: Obstacles were found in appropriate provision of palliative care. Inadequate education and training to manage severe symptoms, poorly defined laws and regulations for palliative care provision, and a lack of algorithms and guidelines for care were major barriers in the effective provision of palliative care. Conclusion: Assessment of palliative care in this medium-income transitional-economy country is one of the first steps in the initiation of integration of palliative care into the existing health system. Achieving this requires identifying obstacles and resolving these issues.

Keywords : end-of-life care, middle income country, palliative care, symptom control

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