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Palliative care in graduate nursing education

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Abstract

With its origins in the hospice movement, palliative care represents an important treatment option for patients with life threatening illnesses. The goal of palliative care is to provide pain management, symptom control, and psychosocial support to patients and their families as they face terminal or advanced chronic illness. Although nurses play a critical role in the provision of palliative care, few of them receive formal training in palliative care. Despite multiple efforts to improve the quality of nursing education in palliative care, little is known about the extent to which nursing schools incorporate such training into their curricular. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to systematically examine the extent to which palliative care is incorporated in graduate nursing education in the United States. All 418 master's programs and 112 doctoral programs (accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education) were included. Web-based and manual searches of school catalogs and other relevant materials were conducted. The quality of graduate nursing education in palliative care was examined according to the following criteria:

1) Presence of graduate faculty members, who specialize in palliative care,

2) Graduate course offerings in palliative care,

3) Continuing education programs in palliative care.

The preliminary findings suggest that a dearth of adequate nursing training in palliative care exists. Few schools incorporate palliative care into their graduate education. Provision of optimal quality palliative care to the growing number of people who are dying of chronic illnesses remains a major challenge.

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