

Building capacity of allied health professionals to care for the dying: achievements and lessons from the Palliative Care Curriculum for Undergraduates project

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Background

Effective palliative care delivery requires an informed health sector, committed to providing care focused on quality of life for people with life-limiting illnesses, and their families. Funded by the Australian Government, the *Palliative Care Curriculum for Undergraduates Project* (PCC4U) promotes the inclusion of palliative care education as an integral part of all medical, nursing, and allied health undergraduate and entry-to-practice training, and ongoing professional development. Implementation in allied health disciplines increased from 22% in 2011 to 42% in 2014. To further improve implementation rates, the PCC4U evaluation, and implementation exemplars have been analysed.

Methods

Data were obtained from two sources. Firstly, 22 semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with allied health academics in Australian universities who utilise PCC4U resources, including occupational therapy (3), social work (2), physiotherapy (1), nutrition and dietetics (1). They explored the extent of inclusion of palliative care in courses; factors impacting upon inclusion of palliative care; changes in student knowledge, confidence, values and attitudes; and the evaluation and outcomes of using the PCC4U learning resources. Secondly, the PCC4U 2014 seminar series showcased innovations in palliative care curricula, with nine allied health representatives highlighting exemplars of strengthening the inclusion of palliative care.

Results

This exploration of implementation of PCC4U highlighted key issues in uptake, including the capacity of academic personnel to provide content expertise; challenges of the 'crowded curriculum'; availability of mentors and networks of support to promote reflective practice; and access to palliative care clinical placements. The PCC4U seminar series identified a range of opportunities and challenges to implementation, including expanding the continuum of education /training, and provided exemplars of successful teaching and learning initiatives.

Discussion

Strategies to build on successful implementation of PCC4U in allied health programs were identified and will be utilised to increase implementation rates and build capacity in the allied health workforce.