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Competencies for Palliative Care Specialists – new catalogue

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After three years of work, a catalogue of competencies for palliative care specialists has now been published. The catalogue was developed by the task force SwissEduc on behalf of the national Swiss Palliative Care Association, palliative.ch. The 100 page document describes in detail the competencies for the B2(specialized) level for medical and nursing professions, as well as for psycho-social professionals.

Palliative care is continuously gaining importance in Europe, but in many countries it is still not recognized as a medical specialty. For the most part this specialized field of health care still lacks commonly agreed upon standards for recognition. For this reason, defining the competencies required of palliative care specialists is of critical importance. This catalogue systematically maps out what is necessary in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes; additionally, the catalogue can facilitate the creation of competencies-based training programs within post-graduate courses. In the context of inter-professional collaboration, the document also will be of help in defining and delineating the specific nature of each profession in the field of palliative care. In quality management, it will help in precisely defining the tasks and working standards for each profession. The document can be used to guide personal competency evaluations, as well as to create training portfolios.

Competencies: a set of behaviours that define professional conduct

Providing palliative care requires a deep understanding of often complex situations. According to the educator Philippe Meirieu, competencies can be understood as the set of potential behaviours -- affective, cognitive and psychomotor -- that allow an individual to perform complex tasks in an efficient manner. Competencies are complex and dynamic. In this sense, they are ideally suited to describe the multi-faceted, interdisciplinary mission of palliative care.

In order to convey an image of palliative care practice in Switzerland that accurately reflects reality, the DACUM method (Developing a curriculum) was utilized to create the catalogue. It therefore reflects the specialists' actual daily activities, rather than an idealized version of their work. Under the guidance of a trained moderator, a task force of selected professionals each analyzed and defined their own fields of expertise.

Looking Towards the Future

The catalog can now be downloaded in German and French from the "palliative.ch" website <http://www.palliative.ch/index.php?id=129&L=4>.

It describes the B2 level for medical and nursing staff as well as for professionals in the psychosocial field. A description of level C (academic) competences will be available in winter 2012. The actual description of the competences in the catalogue demonstrates that palliative care in Switzerland is a young discipline. As a result, there are domains where some competencies still need to be defined. Professional self-reflection is required in order to gradually promote continuous evolution and development. In this sense, the present catalogue should serve as an incentive to increase awareness of the specific competencies as well as to work further for its development and regular update.

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