Palliative Care in Acute Geriatric Units

Results from a Nationwide Survey in France

Lucas MORIN, Régis AUBRY
French National Observatory on End-of-Life Care
Background

**Acute geriatric units** have been widely developed in France since 2003.

They have become a key-point in the care of elderly patients facing end-of-life issues.

However, little is known about the organization of palliative care in these units.
Aims

This survey aims to identify the palliative care resources available to French geriatricians when they encounter difficulties in the care for a patient at the end of life.
Methods

A cross-sectional, questionnaire-based survey was sent to the medical chiefs of all 420 acute geriatric units in France.

Respondents were asked:

1. To assess the frequency and the prevalence of EOL situations
2. To describe the provision of palliative care within their department
3. To define the training of the medical staff regarding palliative care.

All questionnaires were strictly anonymous.
Results

294 units participated in the study.

70% national response rate

Ownership:
- 12% Public Hospitals
- 79% Non-for-profit hospitals
- 7% For-profit clinics
Perceived frequency of EOL situations

“In your Acute Geriatric Unit, you provide care for older people at the end-of-life”:

- Very frequently: 38%
- Quite frequently: 53%
- Rarely: 8%
Estimated prevalence of EOL situations

Among all patients currently hospitalized in your unit…

#1 – How many are at the advanced of terminal stage of a serious illness/condition?

#2 - For how many of these patients could you say “I would not be surprised if they died within the next 6 months”?
292 units
6,881 hospitalized patients

#1 – How many are at the advanced of terminal stage of a serious illness/condition?

17% (n=1,144)
95% CI [16.11-17.89]
292 units
6,881 hospitalized patients

1,144 “palliative” patients

#2 – For how many of these patients could you say “I would not be surprised if they died within the next 6 months”? 

94% (n=1,079)

95% CI [92.58-95.42]
Number of deaths in 2012

62 deaths on average (SD = 3.2)

2.6 deaths per bed (SD = 0.14)

Number of deaths during the last 30 days

5.6 deaths on average (SD = 0.28)

11.4% of these patients died suddenly and totally unexpectedly

35.6% were suffering from moderate to severe cognitive impairment
Provision of palliative care

29% of the geriatric units are located within a facility with a Palliative Care Unit…

But 24% of them never transferred any patient into this PCU

76% of the geriatric units are located within a facility with a Palliative Care Support Team. 44% of them call this PCST “never” or “rarely”.

Palliative Care Support Teams are mainly called for:
- Complex end-of-life decision process
- Pain management
- Support for the relatives
Palliative Care Beds

In France, between the “Palliative Care Units” and “Basic palliative care” national healthcare authorities have created “Palliative Care Beds”.

These are meant to be implemented within standard hospital care units that encounter frequent and complex EOL situations.

According to official guidelines, their creation should come with supplementary nursing resources and with the formal training of a least one physician.

Well… the reality is quite different
Palliative Care Beds

39% of the geriatric units have PC beds

2.88 bed on average (SD = 0.14; min= 1; max= 8)
# Palliative Care Beds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Make the management of end-of-life situation easier</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>&lt; 3 PC beds</th>
<th>≥ 3 PC beds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment of extra nurses</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>&lt; 3 PC beds</th>
<th>≥ 3 PC beds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physicians received PC training</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>&lt; 3 PC beds</th>
<th>≥ 3 PC beds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only one physician</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several physicians</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

70% response rate

First **nationwide study** about end-of-life care in geriatric units in Europe

High **prevalence** of EOL situations (16% of all patients)

Limitations: retrospective design, possible recall bias, representative sample, few individual-level data.

**Next step:** multicenter register of Acute Geriatric Units ? (based on the very good example of the Swedish Register)