Palliative Care in Long-term Care Settings for Older People: findings from an EAPC Taskforce

Article in European Journal of Palliative Care - September 2013

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Palliative Care in Long-term Care Settings for Older People: findings from an EAPC Taskforce

The work of the European Association for Palliative Care (EAPC) Taskforce on Palliative Care in Long-term Care Settings for Older People is now completed. How can such care be improved? Elisabeth Reitinger, Katherine Froggatt, Kevin Brazil, Katharina Heimerl, Jo Hockley, Roland Kunz, Hazel Morbey, Deborah Parker and Bettina S Husebo briefly describe the Taskforce’s methods and key findings.

A changing demography across European and other developed countries is leading to an older and, in many cases, more dependent population. Consequently, the demand for long-term care is changing. This has, in turn, led to the consideration of new models of service delivery, funding and quality management in the long-term care sector.1

A significant proportion of older people (defined as those aged 65 and over) die in long-term care settings – approximately 20% in the UK2 and 15% in Austria.3 Older people living in long-term care facilities (LTCFs) in Western societies often have non-cancer co-morbidities, and there is a high prevalence of dementia in this population.4,5

Palliative care is acknowledged as an appropriate approach to support these people as they are nearing death and is being promoted in LTCFs in a number of ways.6 However, there are challenges in the implementation of new approaches, partly due to the complexity of care provision.

For many years, the European Association for Palliative Care (EAPC) has encouraged a focus on palliative care for older people in LTCFs.7 In 2011, to further develop activity at a European level, the EAPC Taskforce on Palliative Care in Long-term Care Settings for Older People was formally recognised.8 Its aim was to identify and map the different ways of developing palliative care in long-term care settings across Europe. This paper summarises the work of the Taskforce, its methods and some of its key findings.

A Europe-wide mapping exercise

Thirteen European countries were involved in the work of the Taskforce: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. The initial task was to establish a European network of experts. These ‘country informants’ had to have relevant practice, research and/or educational experience, as well as links to specialists in their respective countries.

Once country informants had been identified, a two-phase mapping exercise was conducted in collaboration with them.

- Phase 1 involved the collection of contextual information about palliative care and long-term care provision for older people in each country. The information obtained concerned: the older population; the nature and types of long-term care settings; the wider funding and regulatory contexts; and key drivers for change.

- In Phase 2, country informants were asked to identify, in their respective countries, initiatives in the fields of clinical practice development, education and research that had been designed to improve palliative care in long-term care settings. Data about each initiative, their focus and impact were collected, summarised, collated and made available as a compendium, which can be found on the website of the International Observatory on End of Life Care.*
As the data used in this mapping exercise were already in the public domain, ethical approval was not required.

**Key findings**

**Country contexts**
The 13 countries involved in this mapping exercise ranged in population size from 4.5 million (Ireland) to over 80 million (Germany). As a proportion of the population, the percentage of individuals aged 65 and over varied from 11.4% in Ireland to 21% in Italy. In most countries, more than 15% of the population were aged 65 years and over.9–11 The proportion of long-term care beds available for older people varied from 16 beds per 1,000 inhabitants in Italy to over 84 beds per 1,000 inhabitants in Sweden.9,12 The information about the country contexts (summarised in Table 1) gives an idea of the complexity of the health- and social care sectors within which palliative care is being provided in LTCFs.

**Identified initiatives**
Over 60 initiatives promoting palliative care provision in LTCFs have been identified, to date, in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. To classify these initiatives, the Taskforce members agreed on a typology adapted from work in relation to organisational change.13,14 The typology considers the level of change at which initiatives are focused: individual level (staff, family, resident); group or team level; organisational level; regional or network level; and national level. Examples of the types of initiatives are given in Table 2.

The identified initiatives can also be classified according to who the change is focusing on in the first place – staff members, family members or residents. For example, educational initiatives can be designed either for care workers, for interdisciplinary team members or for family members – the final outcome being better care for residents. Some of the initiatives sought to address issues encountered in clinical practice. Others took a broader perspective, looking at change in the wider cultural context within which care is provided; for example, change through organisational development. For details about all initiatives, see the compendium* and the Taskforce’s report.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of change</th>
<th>Types of initiatives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual level (resident, family, staff)</td>
<td>- Assessment tools</td>
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<td>- Communication and information interventions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Education</td>
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<td>- Leadership development</td>
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<td>- Clinical assessment tools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group/team level</td>
<td>- Interprofessional education</td>
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<td>- Interprofessional rounds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organisational level</td>
<td>- Shared working between palliative care, hospice teams and LTCFs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Specialist palliative care units in LTCFs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Organisational development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional/network level</td>
<td>- Regulation</td>
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<td>- (Inter)professional networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>National level</td>
<td>- Legal frameworks</td>
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<td>- National strategies</td>
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<td>- Funding policies</td>
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<td>- Standards and guidelines for palliative care in long-term care</td>
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**Complexity of implementing change**
A number of factors influence how palliative care in long-term care settings can be improved in Europe. These factors include:
- Whether or not long-term care facilities are acknowledged as being home for the older people who live there
- Whether differentiated service provision is available to meet varying levels of need
- What the roles of the different types of providers are
The Taskforce’s work: Sigrid Beyer, Georg Bollig, Manuel Luís Vila Capelas, informants and advisory group members who contributed to this EAPC (EAPC) for its practical support. They would also like to thank the country councils.

Acknowledgements

* The Taskforce’s compendium of initiatives can be found at:
www.lancs.ac.uk/shm/research/ieelc/projects/eapc-taskforce-ltc

** The Taskforce’s report is available at:
www.eapcnet.eu
Themes/Specifiquegroups/Olderpeople/Longtermcaresettings.aspx

References


36. Elisabeth Reitinger, Associate Professor, IFF – Palliative Care and Organisational Ethics, University of Klagenfurt in Vienna, Austria; Katherine Froggatt, Senior Lecturer, International Observatory of End of Life Care, Lancaster University, UK; Kevin Brazil, Professor, Palliative Care, Queens University Belfast, Ireland; Katharina Heimerl, Associate Professor, IFF – Palliative Care and Organisational Ethics, University of Klagenfurt in Vienna, Austria; Jo Hockley, Nurse Consultant (Care Homes), St Christopher’s Hospice, London, UK; Roland Kunz, Head of Department, Palliative Geriatries, Hospital Afoltern, Afoltern am Albis, Switzerland; Hazel Morley, Research Associate, Faculty of Health and Medicine, Lancaster University, UK; Deborah Parker, Associate Professor and Director, Blue Care Research and Practice Development Centre, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia; Bettina S Husebo, Associate Professor, Department of Public Health and Primary Health Care, University of Bergen, Norway.

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