

Patient Centered Outcome Measures (PCOMs) improve communication and the emotional well-being of patients in the last stage of life

New findings from research at the Cicely Saunders Institute, King's College London

- Patients who feedback information about their quality of life via structured questionnaires (PCOMs) report improved emotional well-being.
- Feedback of PCOMs data also improves communication between patients and health professionals.
- Information captured by PCOMs help health professionals to identify unmet patient needs and concerns, and allows them to act to deliver more effective and cost-effective care.

Summary of policy recommendations

- Ensure use of PCOMs plays a key role in the formation of clinical care plans to increase emphasis on person-centered care.
- Provide training and resources to all palliative care health professionals to facilitate effective use of PROMs.
- Invest in research to further assess the impact of PCOMs feedback on health care outcomes, particularly in regards to the effect on the performance of palliative care multidisciplinary teams.
- Fund implementation projects to further understand how and why PROMs can work in clinical practice and identify ways in which the measures can be improved.

Introduction

A major challenge faced by health professionals is how to treat the often complex symptoms and concerns of palliative care patients. Patients may find it difficult to communicate their needs, and one of the most accurate and valuable ways to collect patient information and measure the change in a patient's health status over time is via patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs). By measuring the change in a patient's health status over time, these tools can help clinicians to assess the efficiency of care, leading to more cost-effective treatment plans¹ and improved emotional well-being for patients.

What is a PCOM?

Patient Centered Outcome Measures (PCOMs) are a means of capturing data relating to patients' symptoms, concerns and perceptions of their care based on or close to a person's own report. These measures often consist of surveys and questionnaires, which can be collected on paper forms or electronically via tablets or other devices. The advantage of PCOMs is that they are designed to reflect the perspective of the patient, even if the patient is too unwell to complete the measure, which is important in advanced illness.

Research Findings

We performed a systematic search of literature from 1985 to 2013 for articles focusing on collection, transfer and

feedback of PCOMs in palliative care. We identified 184 relevant studies, including data on 70,466 patients which included evidence of the impact the use of PCOMs had on patient care and overall quality of life.

The literature analysed demonstrates strong evidence that PCOMs feedback affects the process of care delivery, enabling more responsive and holistic care:

- 1) There is more understanding and recognition of symptoms
- 2) There is greater communication about health-related quality of life resulting in detection of unrecognised problems²
- 3) Clinicians take more actions in response to the information collected by the PCOMs tools

We also investigated the effect of PCOMs feedback on patient care outcomes. The available evidence shows that there is generally no improvement in physical symptom burden but improved psychological and emotional well-being of patients was reported in several studies.

The completion of these measures provides patients with a means to report their concerns and experiences of care directly to clinicians. This allows health professionals to better understand and therefore address patient needs and healthcare commissioners to assess the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of care at individual and population levels.

Policy Recommendations

In order to ensure that the most effective care is provided to patients, and that patients and carers are listened to, we recommend:

1) Implementing PCOMs in clinical care plans

The ability of PCOMs to identify the concerns and improve the well-being of patients has been documented, and as a result clinical teams should consider incorporating these measures into care plans. Healthcare commissioners should consider the overall impact of these measurement tools on palliative care services.

2) Providing training and resources to care teams

To ensure that the information gathered in the PROMs is used effectively, teams should be trained and provided with the resources and equipment necessary to implement measures into everyday clinical practice.

3) Investing in further funding and research projects

More high-quality research is needed to assess the use of PCOMs in patients with non-cancer conditions and across a wider range of settings. Future research projects will develop ways of using these measures to further improve patient-professional communication and ensure that patients are supported as well as possible in the last months of their lives.

References

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