

Attitude and knowledge about end-of-life support: a Bavarian survey

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Background:

Palliative care is seen as a public health priority in the ongoing political discussion in Germany. To better understand the needs of the general population and awareness of end-of-life support programs and institutions in a rural Bavarian district, we launched a survey within the periphery of our regional centre for oncology and palliative care (Fig.1).

Methods:

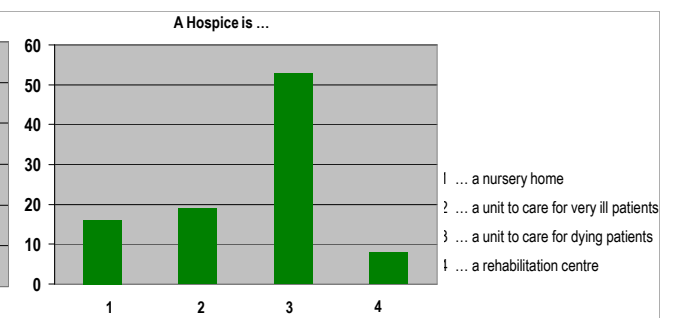
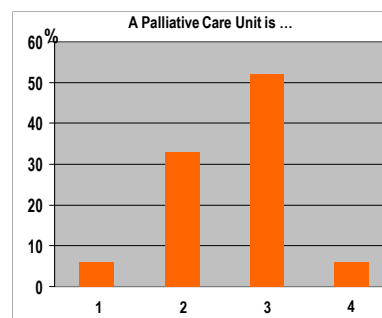
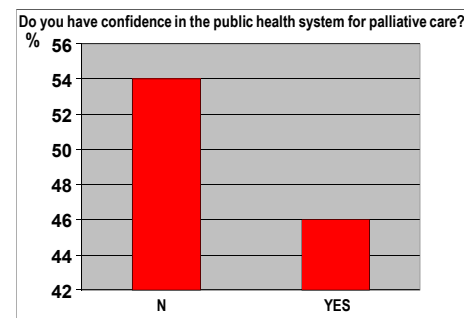
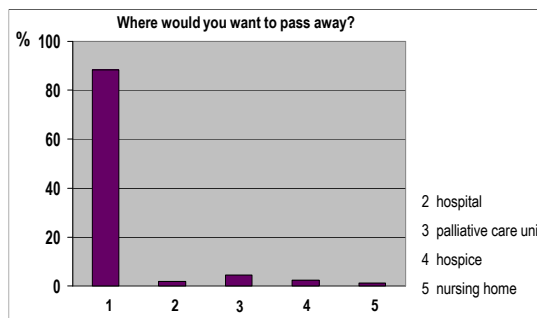
Between 11/2009 and 3/2010, 1017 persons were interviewed consecutively and anonymously by independent investigators using a standardized questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised 20 questions regarding demographic data, knowledge of local palliative and end-of-life institutions, attitude towards end-of-life support in case of own incurable illness and degree of confidence in the public health system. Analysis was cross-sectional; subgroup analyses (sex, age, profession) were performed.



Fig. 1: The Centre for Oncology and Palliative Care Landshut is located in the rural region of Lower Bavaria (1): Private Practice and Day Clinic for Hematology & Oncology & Palliative Care Medicine (2) / Palliative Care Unit Hospital Landshut-Achdorf (3)

Results:

- Interviewees: 53% female / 47% male; age 18-75 years
- 46% married, 9% steady partnership, 7% divorced, 4% widowed
- Only 53% could describe the function of a hospice correctly, 52% thought that a palliative unit mainly cares for dying patients.
- 23% did not know that there is a palliative care unit in town; whereas 48% wrongly assumed that there is a hospice.
- These deficits of knowledge were also seen to some extent in the group of health care workers.



Conclusions:

- The survey revealed an impressive deficit of information regarding the function and availability of local end-of-life support institutions .
 - There is a low rate of confidence in the public health system for palliative care in one of the wealthiest regions in Germany.
- ⇒ For the successful implementation of palliative care and hospice programs a regional information campaign seems to be essential.

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