

Impact of teaching session on concepts of palliative care in medical undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

Background: The objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of teaching session on concepts of palliative care and pain management among medical undergraduate students in a tertiary care hospital.

Methods: The study was conducted in tertiary care teaching hospital among undergraduates. 152 medical students were enrolled. Pre-session questionnaire was distributed to the students and the response was obtained. This was followed by an educational lecture with power point presentation for 45 minutes and post-lecture response to the questionnaire was perceived. With comments, a qualitative mathematic analysis was carried out.

Results: With response of 90% the attitude of students regarding incurable terminal illness did not change due to educational training. Comparison of knowledge and attitude in pre-session and post session in 4th year undergraduates was higher (p value <0.001 & <0.0001) in comparison to 2nd year undergraduates (P value <0.0002 & < 0.0005). Post session mean assessment also showed slight increase for 4th year (45.6 & 87.4) when compared with 2nd year students (42.8 & 82.12).

Conclusions: Concept of palliative care was poor among medical undergraduates. Health care providers can overcome by knowledge construction, interrelation between practice and evidence based medicine.

Keywords: Palliative care education, Professional knowledge, Questionnaire study

INTRODUCTION

Palliative care as defined by WHO is “an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-limiting illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification, impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems physical, psychosocial, and spiritual”.¹The primary areas of concern in palliative care include unresolved symptoms and complex psychosocial issues for patients with advanced disease, complex end of life issues, complex bereavement issues.

It is best administered by a multi-dimensional, interdisciplinary team comprising of doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, counsellors, pharmacists, social workers, volunteers, and family members.²

Studies show that doctors and health care professionals lack the ability to provide end-of-life care and cater to the needs of the dying patients due to the inadequate knowledge in administering the adequate dosages of analgesics and sedatives.³ Health professionals function largely within a culture that focuses on cure, and many avoid the patient who is dying. It is therefore vital that all health care practitioners have contact with people who are dying, including medical, allied health science, nursing and apply the best principles of palliative care.

Understanding the existing level of palliative care knowledge and attitudes toward end of life care would be an important benchmark for analysis of future educational effort.⁴ The objective of present study was to evaluate the knowledge about the concepts of palliative care among the medical undergraduate students using educational session.

METHODS

The study was conducted in Kamineni Institute of Medical Sciences, Narketpally between June and August 2014. Target population for the study included undergraduate medical students (second and fourth year) and a total of 152 students participated in the study. Permission from institutional review board and written informed consent were obtained from subjects. The course comprised 50 hours of teaching over a period of three months and topics were imparted by professor from palliative care. The topics covered are principles of palliative medicine, pain treatment, psychiatric, gastro intestinal, genitourinary, respiratory and neurological problems; ethical aspects of caring for terminally ill patients.

A 25-point questionnaire was prepared according to following criteria: multiple choice exam and a clinical case. The students who were unwilling to fill the questionnaire were excluded from the study. A pre-test informed consent was taken from every student participated in this study. Pre-session questionnaire was distributed to the students and the response was obtained. This was followed by an educational lecture with power point presentation for 45 minutes. Later, post-lecture response to the questionnaire was taken. Time of 30 minutes was given to each student for filling the questionnaire. Data was entered in Microsoft excel and percentages were used to summarize the data. The results were analyzed and compared.

RESULTS

Among the 152 medical students, who participated in the questionnaire study 49% belong to 2nd year and 51% belong to 4th year medical undergraduates. Males and female students included in the study are 36% and 64%.

Table 1: Attitude of students regarding incurable terminal illness.

	Natural death	Euthanasia	Unsure
Pre session	60.5 %	29.6%	9.9%
Post session	65.1 %	30.1%	4.8%

Out of total 25 questionnaires distributed and collected, 22 valid questions were included for analysis with response rate of 92.6%. The descriptive data in the study participant is provided in Table 1-3 and Figure 1-6.

Table 2: Comparison of pre session and post session among 2nd and 4th MBBS students.

Students	Parameters	Pre session (mean \pm SD)	Post session (mean \pm SD)	P value
2 nd year	Knowledge (19)	49.9 \pm 4.7	63.03 \pm 5.5	< 0.0002
	Attitude (6)	49.80 \pm 5.5	62.64 \pm 4.3	< 0.0005
4 th year	Knowledge (19)	47.63 \pm 3.8	61.8 \pm 0.9	< 0.001
	Attitude (6)	48.4 \pm 3.6	64.5 \pm 1.2	< 0.0001

Table 3: Comparison in percentage of correct responses.

Question number	% of correct responses in pre session	% of correct responses in post session
1	44.7	51.9
2	18.4	69.7
3	47.3	46.7
4	15.8	69.7
5	42.1	51.3
6	39.5	48.7
7	44.7	50.0
8	40.8	53.3
9	45.4	47.4
10	46.7	60.5
11	18.4	65.1
12	23.0	65.1
13	26.3	65.1
14	31.6	60.5
16	31.6	54.6
17	34.2	53.2
18	39.4	57.2
19	40.8	61.9
20	38.1	51.3
21	34.9	50.0
22	32.9	59.2
23	39.4	54.6
24	42.8	48.7
25	40.8	54.6

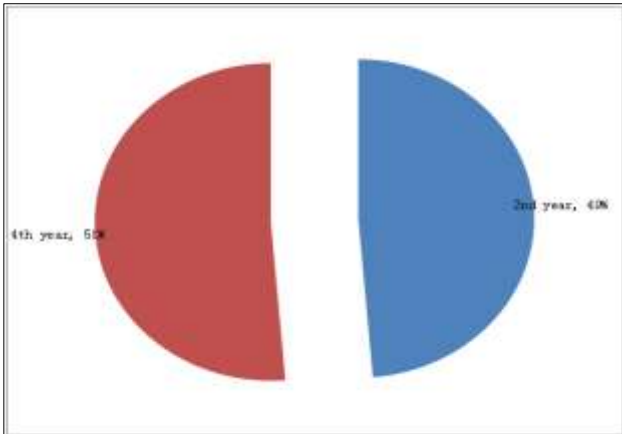


Figure 1: Pie chart showing distribution of students.

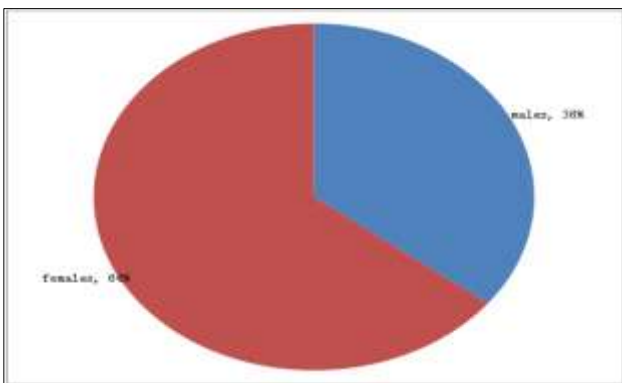


Figure 2: Pie chart showing sex distribution.

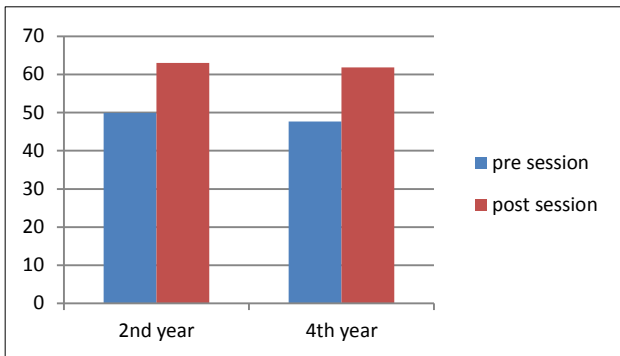


Figure 3: Bar chart showing comparison of pre session and post session mean scores on knowledge.

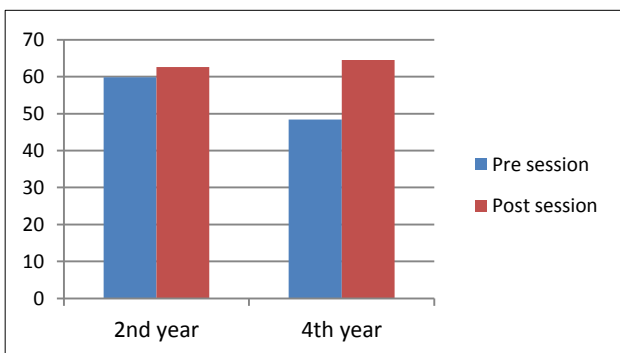


Figure 4: Bar chart showing comparison of pre session and post session mean scores on attitude.

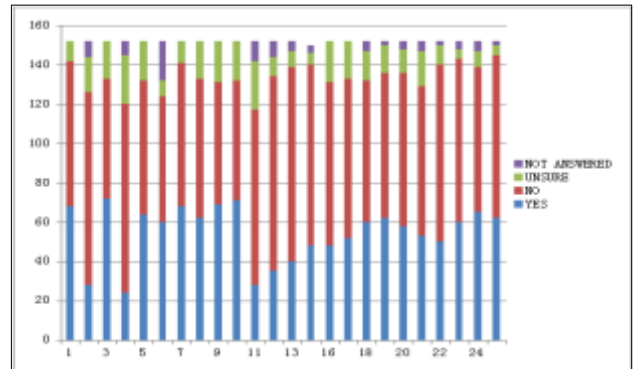


Figure 5: Response of students in pre-session.

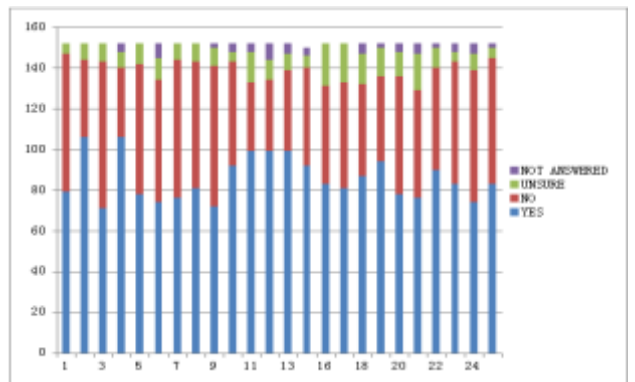


Figure 6: Response of students in post-session.

DISCUSSION

Modern health care advancements had increased the average life expectancy and the patients with serious illness live longer. But due to the severity of illness the patients cannot lead a comfortable life. They expect medical fraternity to help them by increasing their quality of life.

The undergraduate curriculum for the palliative care is not well structured and has many inadequacies. Palliative care is the active care of dying where the social, emotional, physical, psychological problems of the patients are dealt. The goal of palliative care should continue to focus on the improvement of the quality of life for patients with advanced illnesses. It is based on an interdisciplinary approach that is offered simultaneously with other appropriate medical therapies.

In the pre-educational session, there was an inadequate knowledge about palliative care and pain management with lack of positive attitude indicating the current awareness about palliative care in the medical students. Following the session, there was an overall significant improvement in knowledge, pain management and attitude scores showing the impact of the session and

ability of the students in gaining knowledge about palliative care, which was similar to previous studies.

Study done by Uwimana et al, had shown that more than half of the primary care physicians lack knowledge regarding the concepts of palliative care.⁵

Meta-analysis done by Billings et al, have shown that there is need for integration of palliative care training at the undergraduate curriculum. The present study supports the view of Billings et al, as palliative care is need of hour for many individuals suffering from severe illness due to increased life expectancy.⁶

Mean scores (42.8 and 82.12) of correct response towards palliative care in 2nd year students pre and post session (Table 3 & figure 5) was less when compared to 4th year students (45.6 and 87.4).

Knowledge and attitude in 4th year medical undergraduates in pre and post session regarding palliative care in comparison to 2nd year medical undergraduates was better as compared by P value (Table 2) because of clinical practice.

Attitude of the students towards incurable terminal illness did not change much due to educational session as number of people favouring natural death and euthanasia is 90.1% in the pre session and 95.2% in the post session (Table 1).

A modest palliative care curriculum can yield improvements in medical student knowledge and attitudes. However, expansion of palliative care skills training and assessment are needed for students to have more meaningful outcomes and to ultimately contribute to better patient outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Overall level of knowledge about palliative care was poor and dedicated palliative care education is required before MBBS undergraduates enter into clinical care of the patients.

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Conflict of interest: None declared

Ethical approval: The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee

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