

Early palliative care avoids emergency stress

September 3 2013, by Ajanthy Arulpragasam



Cancer patients who receive early access to community-based palliative care are less likely to go to the emergency department coming towards the end of their life, according to Curtin University research.

Published in the *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, the retrospective, cross-sectional study investigated whether early admission of [cancer patients](#) to community-based palliative care reduced [emergency department](#) admissions in the last three months of life.

Research found that of 746 WA adults who died of cancer, 52 per cent of people who didn't have access to palliative care went to the emergency department in their final three months. Those that had access to palliative care were less likely to go to emergency with a 31 per cent visitation in this group.

Lead researcher, Beverley McNamara, from Curtin School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work says those who receive community based palliative care in the home early enough, are less likely to go to the emergency department in that vulnerable time when really sick.

"An emergency department setting is not always the best place of care for a seriously [ill person](#) coming towards the end of their lives," Prof McNamara says.

"That's not to say that it may not be needed because there are often acute things that happen to people.

"If a person gets that home-based palliative care early enough they are more likely to be able to stay in their homes and be cared for in their homes than having to go into the emergency department.

"We've shown in another study that if they get palliative care in their homes they are more likely to die in their homes than if they were in hospital and that often suits the needs of many people."

The findings of this study have resource and [economic implications](#).

"It's probably economically more viable to provide support in the home," Prof McNamara says.

"Community-based palliative care needs to be adequately resourced in order to provide the sorts of services that will keep people in their homes and cared for and comfortable in their homes to avoid having to go into an acute setting."

Prof McNamara says the next stage of the study will examine other illnesses as well as people in aged care settings and in the home.

More information: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23676094

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