

CONNECTICUT

Assessing and Meeting the Unmet Training Needs of End-of-Life Health Care Providers

The Connecticut Cancer Partnership, in collaboration with the Connecticut Coalition to Improve End-of-Life Care (CCIELC), conducted a statewide survey and focus groups to identify the unmet educational needs of palliative and end-of-life (EOL) health care providers as a basis for creating educational initiatives to meet their needs.

Public Health Problem

A number of influential reports have identified gaps in knowledge about care of individuals who are at the end of life, recommending improved training of health care professionals. Knowledge gaps have been associated with patients' needless suffering from physical symptoms and emotional concerns. The most recent Institute of Medicine report on improving the care of the dying describes how there has been little research on EOL care training needs following health care providers' basic education. Although more than 29,000 Connecticut residents die each year, limited advances have been made toward the development of successful state-based educational programs in meeting the needs of EOL health care providers.

Program Activity

The survey's content was based on six literature-based domains to capture unmet educational needs related to EOL knowledge and competencies. In addition, the survey assessed methods of delivering educational content. The survey was administered to EOL health care providers over the Internet, at statewide professional meetings, and by direct contact from September 2008 to May 2009. Focus groups were conducted in August 2009.

Program Impact

Providers representing eight disciplines completed 602 surveys.

The needs most commonly reported were help dealing with cultural and spiritual matters and having supportive resources at work.

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Focus groups confirmed survey results and highlighted the need for processing of EOL issues to enhance personal and professional comfort. One respondent stated, “I have a greater fear of a dying person than a dead person.... You're afraid of messing up. They're only in this state once in life and you're afraid of doing something wrong.... It's emotional.... I may cause [a patient] pain or discomfort, and that's what bothers me more than not knowing what to do.”

Respondents indicated they preferred a half-day on-site training, spread over 1 to 2 days.

Program Action

The CCIELC has disseminated these findings to key stakeholders and plans to use findings to create topics for its Annual 2010 Spring Educational Conference.

The CCIELC will develop core courses in needed areas of EOL content to be used by local agencies.

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