Costs of Terminal Patients who Receive Palliative Care or Usual Care in Different Hospital Wards

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Background
In addition to the effectiveness of hospital care models for terminal patients, policy makers and health care payers are concerned about their costs.

Aim of the study
This study aims to measure the hospital costs of treating terminal patients in Belgium from the health care payer perspective. This study compares the costs of palliative and usual care in different types of hospital wards.

Material and Methods
A multicenter, retrospective cohort study compared costs of palliative care with usual care in acute hospital wards and with care in palliative care units.

The study enrolled terminal patients from a representative sample of hospitals. Health care costs included fixed hospital costs and charges relating to medical fees, pharmacy and other charges. Data sources consisted of hospital accountancy data and invoice data.

Results
*Six hospitals participated in the study, generating a total of 146 patients: 94 patients were cared for in acute wards and 52 patients were cared in dedicated palliative care units. The mean total cost per day for patients in these hospitals was calculated (Fig 1).
*Palliative care in an acute ward is cheaper (283€/d) than usual care (340 €) in an acute ward. (Fig 2)
*The findings show that palliative care in a palliative care unit was more expensive (522€/d) than palliative care in an acute ward (283 €/d) due to higher staffing levels in palliative care units. (Fig 3)

Conclusions:
1- This study suggests that palliative care models in acute wards need to be supported because such care models appear to be much less expensive (57€ less/day) than usual care and we can expect that such care models are likely to better reflect the wishes / needs of terminal patients.
2- This finding emphasizes the importance of the timely recognition of the need for palliative care in terminal patients treated in acute wards.
3- Palliative care units are intrinsic more expensive due to the higher staffing levels ... but necessary for the more complex profile of these patients.

Published in JOURNAL OF PALLIATIVE MEDICINE Volume 13, Number 11, 2010