

MANAGEMENT

Integration of Palliative care in undergraduate and postgraduate training programs in Albania

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Abstract

In Albania Palliative Care (PC) services started in 1993 with three teams that operated as NGO's. One of them was “Mary Potter” PC team in the southeastern part, “Sue Ryder” care in the central part and “Caritas”, operated in the north part of the country. PC at home was the main service offered by these teams from the beginning on. “Mary Potter” is the only hospice in the country with 8 beds offering only day services and has three departments: Home Care, Hospice care and Education. These days, 11 new PC units operate in regional hospitals all over Albania. During the years PC in Albania had to face a lot of challenges among these: increased number of people in need for PC, lack of funds, lack of knowledge and education of healthcare personnel and other professionals about PC, and lack of stakeholders' interest to integrate PC in the public health care. “Mary Potter” PC Center/Hospice is the only educational center to train PC for healthcare professionals all over the country. Since 2017 up to now 10.420 healthcare professionals have been trained. The staff has organized various training sessions with in total 73 graduates. The efforts to develop PC have resulted in the approval of a Law on PC delivery. PC is now integrated in undergraduate and postgraduate training programs and a mandatory subject in the curriculums of the Faculties of Nursing. In the academic year 2019-2020, a Master of Sciences in PC program started at the Nursing Faculty in Tirana.

Keywords: *palliative care, education, nursing, training programs*

MANAGEMENT

Integrarea îngrijirii paliative în programele de pregătire universitară și postuniversitară din Albania

Rezumat

În Albania, serviciile de îngrijire paliativă (PC) au început în 1993 cu trei echipe care funcționau ca ONG-uri: echipa „Mary Potter” din partea de sud-est, îngrijirile „Sue Ryder” din partea centrală și „Caritas”, în partea de nord a țării. PC la domiciliu a fost principalul serviciu oferit de aceste echipe de la început. „Mary Potter” este singurul hospice din țară, are cu 8 paturi, servicii PC în centru de zi și are trei departamente: Îngrijire la domiciliu, Îngrijire la spital și Educație.

În prezent, 11 noi unități de PC funcționează în spitale regionale din toată Albania. Pe parcursul anilor, PC-ul din Albania a fost nevoit să se confrunte cu multe provocări printre aceștia: un număr crescut de persoane care au nevoie de PC, lipsa fondurilor, lipsa de cunoștințe și educația personalului medical și a altor profesioniști despre PC și lipsa interesului părților interesate de a integra PC în asistența medicală publică. Centrul de PC/hospiceul „Mary Potter” este singurul centru educațional de PC pentru profesioniștii din domeniul sănătății din toată țara. Din 2017, până în prezent, au fost instruiți 10.420 de cadre medicale. Personalul a organizat diverse sesiuni de instruire cu un număr total de 73 de absolvenți. Eforturile de a dezvolta PC au dus la aprobarea unei Legi privind acordarea PC. PC este acum integrat în programe de pregătire universitară și postuniversitară și un domeniu obligatoriu în programele de învățământ ale facultăților de medicină. În anul universitar 2019-2020, a început un program de Master în Științe PC la Facultatea de medicină din Tirana.

Cuvinte cheie: *îngrijiri paliative, educație, asistență medicală, programe de formare*

Schort history

In 1993 Palliative Care (PC) was started in Korça (southeastern part of Albania) in 1993. It was an initiative of a group of catholic missionaries from Great Britain, representatives of the "Little Company of Mary Sisters" a Catholic Religious Congregation founded by Mary Potter in England in 1877. They provided care for cancer patients and also spiritual and psychological support for patients and their families.

After some years they noticed an increasing number of chronically terminal ill patients, especially cancer patients who needed care and support. So, they decided to construct a building in order to provide the care for this category of patients. Since that time this building is called "Mary Potter" PC Center.

From 2003 the services are offered by an interdisciplinary Albanian team. Year after year, the organization has been developed and increased the services provided to the patients. Currently, the center offers a series of services and activities.

Healthcare services and activities

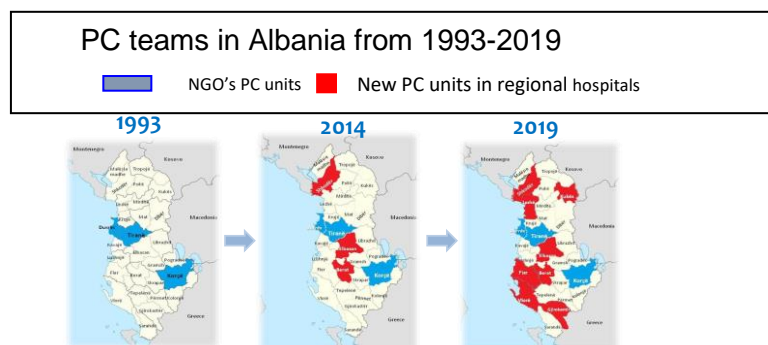
The services provided in "Mary Potter" PC Center are: home care, day therapy, respite care, day center, day Hospice, curative and palliative chemotherapy application and post operatory wound dressings. Actually there are: a day care center, a gym room for patients, bereavement care, meetings with family members, training of volunteers, etc.

The activities held besides these services are multiple: palliative care education of health professionals, lobbying and advocacy, fundraising, preparation and delivery of information on cancer, palliative care and HIV/AIDS, building capacity training for the staff members, training programs for caregivers. Today the Centre is a Day Hospice and a model of excellence for PC.

PC in Albania is founded and offered by NGO's like "Mary Potter" PC Center in Korca, "Sue Ryder" in Tirana, and "Caritas". Oncologic service at home is the only service that is offered at patients' home in Tirana (SOB Shërbimi Onkologjik në Banesë). From 2018 on, there are 11 new PC units set up in regional public hospitals in the country that offer service only in the hospital and not at patients' home (figure 1).

These days less than 100 health care professionals are involved in providing PC in Albania.

Figure 1- Spreading of PC team in Albania 1993-2019



Palliative care development

PC in Albania had faced a lot of challenges during the years such as lack of funds, lack of knowledge about PC of healthcare personnel, lack of education of healthcare professionals in PC, lack of PC as a mandatory subject in curriculums of University of Medicine and Faculty of Nursing. PC was interpreted as a worthless service and there were a small number of PC teams in other cities of Albania. In the University of Medicine PC was included in the subject of oncology with a small number of lectures.

Meanwhile there was an increasing need for the development of PC, because the number of terminally ill was increasing. Opiophobia was present. Health care professionals and the community had a total lack of information about PC. People working in PC needed collaborators to take care for the terminally ill. The spreading of PC knowledge all over Albania became imperative.

From the year 2007 on, more than 87% of GP's in Albania have participated in different training programs on PC organized by "Mary Potter" PC Center and other national actors that operate in PC field. Other medical specialists from public and private healthcare services have also been involved in this kind of training. Today "Mary Potter" PC Center/Hospice (see photo) is the only education center on Palliative Care in Albania.

Photo 1 - "Mary Potter" PC Center/Hospice



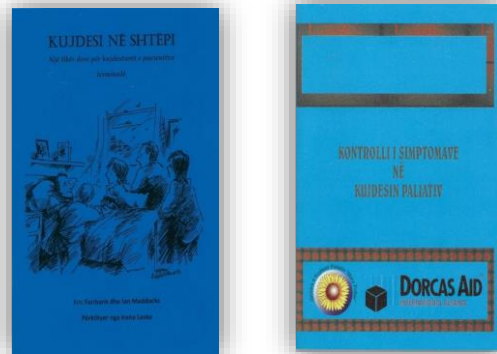
Since 2007 the staff of “Mary Potter” PC Center have organized 12 training programs on PC (training sessions vary between 1 and 5 days), which include 10.432 trainees (nurses, physicians, social workers etc.).

There have been two international “End of Life Nursing Education Consortium” (ELNEC) training programs on “Palliative Care Nursing” with 68 graduates and one on Transformational Leadership: Empowering Palliative Care Nurses to Enhance the Quality of Care for Patients with Complex, Life Threatening Illness and their Families, with 15 nurses graduated, working in PC or teaching in the Nursing Faculties. This program was designed to develop their formal knowledge about leadership, as well as the leadership as leaders.

Elements from curricula

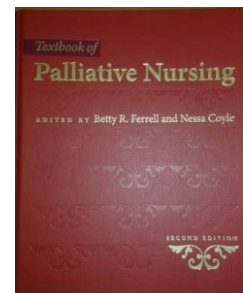
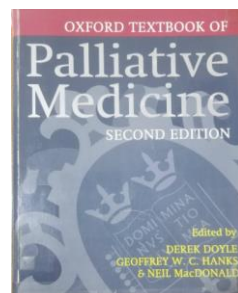
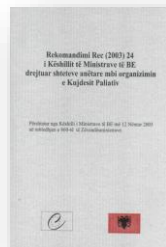
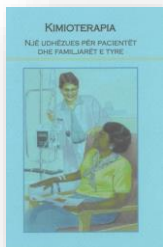
Bachelor of Nursing study program and Professional Master study program have PC as a mandatory subject with respectively 22 and 45 lectures, 8 seminars and 15 hours of practical experience. In academic year 2019-2020, a Master of Sciences in PC started at the biggest Nursing Faculty in Tirana.

The PC curriculums for Nursing Faculties have been prepared using the books and materials adopted and translated from “Mary Potter” PC staff (See the covers below).



Also have been used:

- Doyle D, Hanks G, MacDonald N. “*Oxford Textbook of Palliative Medicine*” 2nd Edition Oxford University Press. 1998.
- Ferrell B, Coyle N. “*Textbook of Palliative Nursing*” 2nd Edition Oxford University Press. 2006.



Conclusions

In Albania, palliative care services are absolutely necessary. These services have been developed slowly and need further development.

It requires committed healthcare professionals with knowledge and abilities in PC followed by further development and spreading of this service all over Albania and making it available for everyone, everywhere.

Conflict of interest: none / **Conflict de interese:** nu există