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Does the number of co-morbidities influence the length of terminal stay in the palliative care unit?

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Introduction: Many terminal patients in a palliative care unit have different co-morbidities along the main diagnosis. It is generally assumed that patients with more co-morbidities are frailer and will die sooner compared to patients that have none or one co-morbidity. We didn't find any support in the scientific literature to support this assumption.

Material and Methods: In a database of 3010 patients that passed away in the palliative care unit of the University Hospital of Leuven (1999-2016) we searched for the effect of the number of co-morbidities on the length of stay of these patients until the date of dying

Results: Patients with 0-2 co-morbidities were a median time of 9 days until death in the palliative care unit while patients with 3 or 4 co-morbidities died after 7 days. After statistical ANOVA analysis it is shown that the number of co-morbidities does not influence the length of stay of terminal patients in the palliative care unit ($p = 0.6381$). The curves of survival probability of patients with 1 to 4 co-morbidities superimpose on each other.

Conclusion: There is no correlation between the number of co-morbidities and the length of stay until death in the palliative care unit for terminal patients. Patients with 1 to 4 co-morbidities die after equally lengths of stay.

Biography

Johan Menten completed his Graduation in Medicine from Limburgs University Center and Catholic University Leuven. He is also a Member of the board of Belgian society of palliative Care till 2000. Now, he is President of the research task group in the Flemish Federation of Palliative Care.

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