

4th International Conference on

Palliative Care, Medicine and Hospice Nursing

August 27-28, 2018 | Boston, USA

When do palliative patients die?

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Background: Many caregivers have the gut feeling that patients die mostly in the night, die more in the weekend than on working days, die more in the winter time than in summer. Therefore we analyzed the moment of death in the database of the palliative care unit.

Material and methods: In this retrospective quantitative study, all 2774 patients passed away in the palliative care unit of the University Hospital of Leuven from 1999 to 2015. Data were extracted from the individual electronic patient files. Time and date of death per patient were noted. Analysis searched for the of death moment per hour over 24h, per week and per month.

Results: Four to 5 patients died per hour equally over 24 hours a day. Every day of the week 13 to 15 patients died and 7 to 9 patients died every month. There is no statistical difference in death frequency per hour over 24 h and the death rate per day and per month is also constant.

Conclusion: Natural death in the palliative care unit is equally spread over the day, over the week and over the year. This analysis helps caregivers to communicate correctly with patients and family and is important for the management and support of caring teams.

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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