

Pharmacists in Palliative and End of Life Care: Exploring Impact and Challenges

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Introduction

In this article, we delve into the vital role of pharmacists in palliative and end of life care, shedding light on how they can significantly influence the quality of care provided. We explore diverse aspects, from the integration of pharmacists into palliative care teams to the accessibility of medications, supporting patients both in hospital and at home, and the types of medications employed during end of life [1]. As advancements in technology, pharmaceuticals, and health promotion lead to longer life expectancies, we find ourselves living with multiple co-morbidities at older ages, ultimately shaping our experiences during palliative and end of life care [2,3]. Although life expectancy in the UK has almost doubled since 1841, the understanding of medication use in this context remains limited. Research focused on older age and dementia reveals the challenges individuals face in managing complex medication regimens with multiple medications and routes of administration [4-8]. In the last year of life, the majority of care is often provided in a home environment, placing increasing responsibilities on family members to manage medications and provide care and support. Managing medications at home becomes a significant task, accompanied by emotional distress, daily practical living challenges, and exhaustion while caring for a dying loved one [10-13]. A growing body of literature emphasizes the complexities of medication provision and management in the community, highlighting the immense work and organization involved [10]. As we explore the impact of pharmacists in palliative and end of life care, it becomes evident that their expertise can play a pivotal role in alleviating medication-related burdens and improving the overall quality of care during these critical stages of life.

Pharmacists' significance in palliative care and end of life care is often underestimated by both patients and healthcare professionals, as evidenced by several studies [14-18]. However, there exists substantial potential for the pharmacy sector to make a meaningful impact, despite certain barriers, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic [16,19,20]. This seeks to transcend the discussion surrounding the potential role of pharmacists in palliative care and instead focuses on showcasing exemplary practices and highlighting the valuable contributions of pharmacists to palliative and end of life care in both hospital and home settings. In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the vital role pharmacists can play in palliative care and end of life care. Despite this, the full potential of pharmacists in these critical areas remains largely unrecognized by both patients and other healthcare professionals. However, several studies and research papers have shed light on the immense value pharmacists bring to the table in enhancing the quality of care and ensuring optimal medication management during the challenging stages of palliative and end of life care [14-18]. The scope for pharmacy involvement in palliative and end of life care is vast, offering various opportunities to improve patient outcomes and experiences. Pharmacists possess unique expertise in medication management, drug interactions, and dosage adjustments, all of which are particularly crucial when patients are dealing with complex medication regimens, multiple comorbidities, and challenging symptoms. Their involvement in the palliative care team can ensure that

patients receive appropriate and personalized pharmacological support to alleviate symptoms, enhance comfort, and optimize medication use. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the significance of pharmacists in providing palliative care. As healthcare systems grapple with increased demands and challenges, pharmacists have demonstrated their resilience and adaptability in ensuring uninterrupted medication access, medication safety, and telehealth consultations for patients receiving palliative and end of life care. The pandemic has accelerated the need for innovative approaches to care delivery, and pharmacists have been at the forefront, leveraging technology and remote services to ensure patients receive the support they need, even in the comfort of their homes [19,20].

The aim is to break through the misconceptions surrounding pharmacists' roles in palliative care and end of life care by showcasing real-world examples of good practice. By collating illustrations of successful pharmacist involvement and highlighting their positive contributions, this seeks to elevate the status of pharmacists in these vital healthcare domains. It emphasizes that pharmacists are not only integral members of the palliative care team but can also be transformative forces in providing holistic care to patients, addressing medication-related challenges, and promoting overall well-being. Moreover, it seeks to emphasize that pharmacists' impact extends beyond hospital settings and into the home environment, where the majority of palliative care is provided. Families and caregivers often face significant challenges in managing medications, and pharmacists can offer invaluable support by educating them about proper administration, potential side effects, and ensuring medication adherence, all while being sensitive to the emotional and psychological aspects of end of life care. By bringing these experiences to the forefront, the aim is to inspire further integration of pharmacists in palliative care teams and promote collaborative efforts in delivering comprehensive and compassionate care to patients and their families.

Conclusion

In conclusion, pharmacists play a pivotal role in palliative care and end of life care, contributing significantly to improving patient outcomes and experiences. Despite the existing barriers, their involvement can be transformative in ensuring optimal medication management and

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addressing medication-related challenges during these critical stages of care. It serves as a platform to shine a spotlight on the positive impact of pharmacists, presenting exemplary practices and emphasizing their potential in both hospital and home care settings. By recognizing and celebrating these contributions, it is hoped that pharmacists will gain the recognition they deserve and become essential partners in delivering holistic and patient-centered palliative and end of life care.

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Conflict of interest

Author declares no conflict of interest.

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