

AMA Survey Response: Assessing Gaps in Palliative & End of Life Care

October, 2015

The Seniors Health Strategic Clinical Network conducted a survey of all primary care physicians in Alberta to assess physicians' perspectives on gaps in both palliative and end of life care (PEOLC). Participation was voluntary, the survey was distributed through the Alberta Medical Association (AMA). Of the 4035 registrants, 458 primary care physicians responded, (response rate of 11.4%). This report is an analysis of the responses provided.

Background:

The survey purpose was to identify gaps in knowledge, services, and supports for primary care physicians caring for patients with life limiting illness. Two definitions were provided at the beginning of the survey, taken from the new Alberta Framework for PEOLC to ensure consistent understanding.

The following themes have been identified as important for the primary care physician caring for PEOLC patients in the primary care setting:

Theme 1 – Need for physician improvement of PEOLC Skills

- 60% of the respondents indicated that PEOLC made up about 20% of their practice, and similar to the rate of mental health illness in Alberta, a further 24% indicated that PEOLC made up approximately 21 – 40% of their practice.
- Almost 80% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed for the need to improve their PEOLC Skills.

Theme 2 – Preference for face-to-face education on PEOLC

- Approximately 45% of respondents indicated that they know of a health professional (physician, home care nurse, zone program) that specializes in PEOLC to consult should they require assistance in providing PEOLC.
- Just under a quarter would consult a non-palliative specialized colleague, nurse or social worker and 11% would refer to online resources.
- Over half of respondents indicated that they would prefer an in-person seminar or on-site education to improve their skills in providing PEOLC, with only 9% preferring education materials and 22% preferring online-supports.

Theme 3 – Increased support to enable patients to remain at home

- The highest ranked support that respondents found would enhance their provision of PEOLC care is access to increased home care supports, followed by increased supports for patients to stay in the home.