

Palliative Medicine A New Specialty in Lebanon



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As the world population increases, the prevalence of older adults is also expected to increase in tandem. This demographic shift towards aging will particularly be felt in developing countries over the next few decades, as the relatively young population moves up the population pyramid. With advances in medical care, a growing number of adults are expected to live to old age and the proportion of elderly will increase. But with longevity comes serious, chronic, and costly illnesses that the Lebanese healthcare system is ill-prepared to deal with.

Geriatric services, long-term care facilities, and palliative care programs are still in their infancy in Lebanon. Palliative care (PC), implemented in parallel with conventional curative care, is now uniformly considered an indispensable component in the management of chronic, progressive and terminal illness and has become the standard of care in developed countries.

Principles of PC are applicable across a wide range of healthcare settings and illnesses. Health care providers, whether in primary care clinics or tertiary care centers, should be familiar with the basic tenets of PC and offer PC services for a diverse spectrum of illnesses, both malignant and non-malignant. Education and training of healthcare professionals is an essential early step that must be implemented at a national level if PC is to enter mainstream medicine.

Additionally, education of the public is necessary for the previously neglected and misunderstood specialty of PC to become widely accepted and commonplace. To prepare practitioners academically, a three-tier framework for PC education is proposed. In keeping with international standards, these levels of training increase in complexity as the target trainee moves from general healthcare workers to career PC practitioners:

- 1- Palliative care approach – intended to integrate principles of PC into the general practice of medicine. It should be offered to healthcare providers across all settings and services. General PC awareness should be initiated in undergraduate education and extended through post graduate training via continuing professional development programs.
- 2- General palliative care – intended for professionals frequently involved in caring for patients who can benefit from the PC approach but for whom PC is not the main focus of their clinical practice. Most practicing practitioners fall in this category. Depending on the discipline, it may be taught at an undergraduate or postgraduate level, or through continuing professional development.
- 3- Specialist palliative care – intended for professionals working solely in the field of PC and whose main activity is devoted to dealing with complex problems requiring specialized skills and competencies. Usually taught at a postgraduate level and reinforced through continuing professional development.

On July 28, 2013, the Ministry of Public Health issued decree # 1/1048 adding palliative care medicine to the current list of specialties recognized in Lebanon. Based on this decree, the candidate must complete a one year fellowship training program in palliative medicine (after residency training) or a two year post-graduate training period, in a recognized and certified program.



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