

CASE REPORT

A framework for integrating advanced practice palliative care competencies in nursing education

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ABSTRACT

Introduction and Objective: It is essential that nursing education prepares graduates to achieve the core skills required for the delivery of quality evidence-based palliative care. Hence, integrating advanced practice palliative care content into the nursing curriculum is an important priority. The objective of this study was to develop a framework and describe the process of integrating palliative care into the nursing curriculum to accelerate advanced practice palliative care competencies.

Methods: Case-study methodology was used to describe an educational initiative. Through this initiative, palliative care education and skills-based resources have been integrated into the graduate nursing curriculum.

Results: Varied palliative care learning resources have been incorporated and include sequential lectures, case studies, practice scenarios with identified palliative care needs, articles, and interprofessional palliative care simulations across multiple courses. To integrate palliative care content into the nursing curriculum a Framework for Integrating Palliative Care in Nursing Education was developed consisting of a cycle of five specific processes: 1) Assessment of curricular needs and goals, 2) Identification and development of resources, 3) Integration of teaching and learning activities, 4) Evaluation of content and learning, 5) Dissemination of resources and findings. A supportive organizational structure and an academic-practice partnership were identified as essential infrastructures for these processes.

Conclusions: This educational initiative was vital in increasing the advanced practice nursing workforce with essential palliative care competencies to provide clinical leadership in a rapidly changing healthcare delivery system.

Key Words: Advanced practice, Doctor of nursing practice education, Nursing, Palliative care

1. INTRODUCTION

Burgeoning prevalence combined with advancements in treatments for chronic and complex life-threatening conditions for children and adults has resulted in an increased demand for quality palliative care.^[1,2] In the context of COVID-19 pandemic, the need for palliative care has been acknowl-

edged even more.^[3,4] Palliative care is specialized care for patients across the lifespan living with serious or life-limiting illnesses and their families to relieve suffering by focusing on the management of physical, psychological, social, and spiritual needs.^[5,6] Palliative care is delivered by the interdisciplinary team and can be delivered along with disease-

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oriented care across the illness trajectory from diagnosis through end-of-life and bereavement care.^[2] The demand for specialist palliative care outweighs.^[1,5-7] Hence, there is an increasing recognition that all health care providers, especially nurses (the largest component of the workforce), should be educated to provide primary palliative care. Primary palliative care includes effective communication, pain, and symptom management, and person-centered support that can be delivered by all care providers without a palliative care specialty training and certification.

There has been an effort to improve palliative care knowledge and skills among the healthcare workforce since the late 1990s.^[8] The American Association of Colleges of Nursing and the City of Hope Medical Center have continuously collaborated in the End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium (ELNEC) project to define primary palliative care competencies and recommendations for both undergraduate and graduate nursing students.^[9,10] Still, many practicing nurses including recent graduates continue to have little or no education in palliative care during their nursing education programs.^[9,11] There is a need for initiatives and providers to achieve quality palliative care as outlined in National Consensus Project Clinical Practice Guideline for Quality Palliative Care^[2] and professional education specifically in primary palliative care.^[12]

Teaching and clinical experiences in palliative care should be integrated throughout nursing education,^[13] yet such training has been limited in many nursing programs.^[14,15] Advanced practice nurses with their expert knowledge and advanced clinical skills, can play a crucial role in improving access and quality of palliative care across the lifespan, in diverse care settings by developing, implementing, and coordinating person-centered plans of care for patients with life-threatening illnesses and their families.^[14] The integration of advanced practice palliative care content into the nursing curriculum is a priority in a rapidly changing healthcare delivery system and to improve care of people at vulnerable times. With the recognition of this need, this paper aims to describe a framework and the experience of one university in integrating advanced practice palliative care into the nursing curriculum to accelerate advanced practice palliative care competencies.

2. METHODS

This paper applies a case-study methodology^[16] to provide processes, experiences, challenges and solutions identified during an educational initiative to integrate palliative care into advanced practice nursing education. The School of Nursing is committed to ensuring students graduate with the competencies and skills needed to deliver effective, individ-

ualized care to all patients living with chronic and complex conditions in diverse settings. An educational initiative was developed with the purpose of integrating palliative care throughout advanced practice curricula and accelerating palliative care competencies among nursing graduates. In collaboration with the multiple academic and clinical partners within accountable care organizations, the project team identified and integrated several palliative care knowledge and skill sets within the curriculum. The systematic curriculum mapping process allowed the team to ensure that palliative care content is embedded throughout the graduate program while providing expert input in the development of palliative care content, including simulations and other interactive learning modules.^[17] Further, the initiative organized multiple palliative care lecture series, workshop, symposium, and conference to disseminate project progress and accelerate palliative care knowledge and competencies among students, faculty, and clinical partners including preceptors. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing and the ELNEC's undergraduate and graduate nursing primary palliative care competencies and recommendations were used to guide this initiative.^[9,10] The initiative was supported by the state's higher education commission. From the implementation of this initiative and curriculum mapping process, a framework to integrate palliative care into the nursing curriculum was developed and described in this paper.

3. RESULTS/PROCESS

An educational initiative was developed and implemented in which the nursing curriculum in advanced practice programs was tailored to support clinical practice. The process of integrating palliative care competencies into the nursing curriculum and a description of the experiences, series of activities, and challenges are described as well as depicted in Figure 1 as a framework for Integrating Palliative Care in Nursing Education. The framework consists of a cycle of five specific processes to: 1) Assess curricular needs and goals, 2) Identify and develop resources, 3) Integrate teaching and learning activities, 4) Evaluate content and learning, and 5) Disseminate resources and findings. The supportive organizational structure and an academic-practice partnership were identified as valuable infrastructure for all steps in this process of palliative care content integration into the curriculum. The detail for each process is described below.

3.1 Assess curricular needs and goals

The school's leadership team including this project team identified the current gaps in education and practice and identified the need for integrating palliative care knowledge and skills within advanced practice nursing education as an organizational priority. The team of researchers from this educational

initiative conducted a thorough assessment of the current advanced practice nursing curriculum and identified the need for specific palliative care content corresponding to the advanced practice specialty focus area. An approach followed by the team was to avoid isolating palliative care content in one course but rather to focus on existing content and integrate palliative care principles and competencies throughout

the courses. The assessment of each course curriculum for advanced practice nursing education, specifically within the different tracks of family primary care, pediatric primary care, adult-gerontological primary care, adult-gerontological acute care, and clinical nurse specialist, helped the team identify specific areas to focus on and develop goals to include palliative care principles and skills.

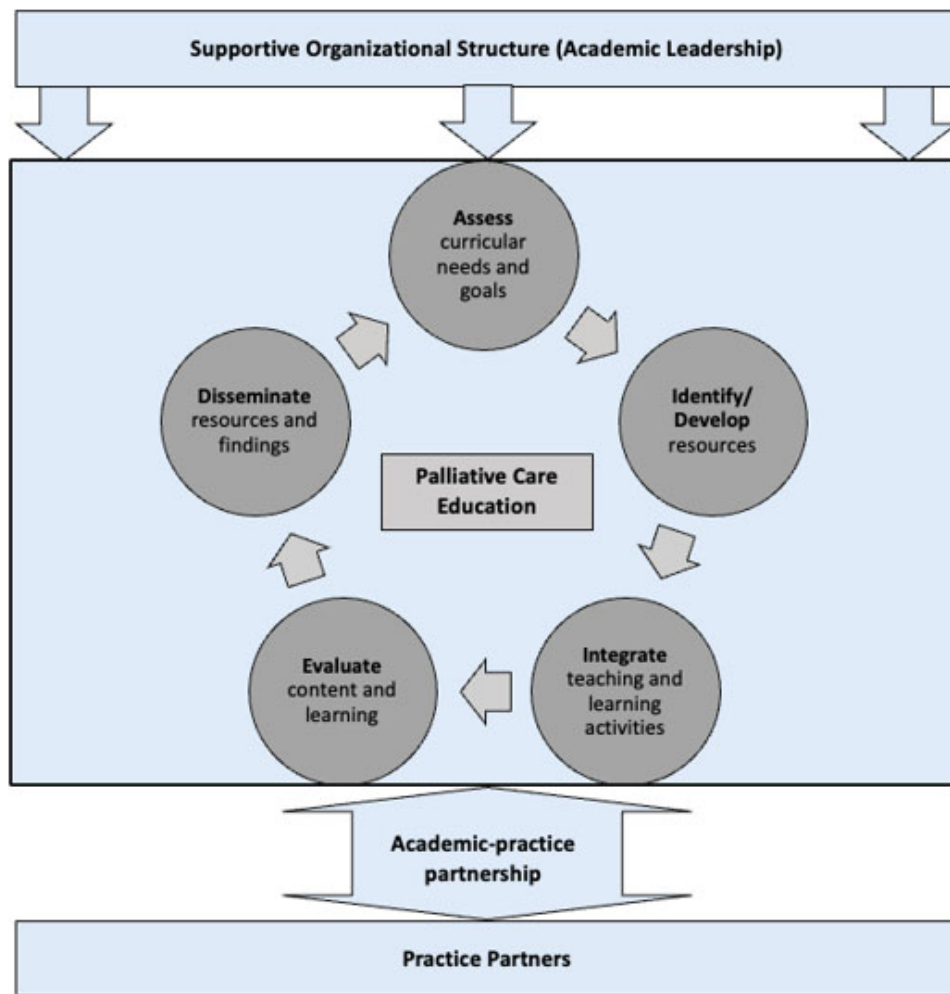


Figure 1. Framework for integrating palliative care knowledge and skills in nursing education

3.2 Identify and develop resources

Once the needs and goals of the curriculum were identified for palliative care knowledge and skills, the next step was to develop palliative care content. As numerous palliative care organizations and initiatives have valuable resources, the team decided to first identify and evaluate existing palliative care resources.^[14] The team conducted a search of online resources and curricula which existed in palliative care. The search identified several strong sources for the palliative care curriculum, including videos and resources from ELNEC,^[18] Center to Advance Palliative Care (CAPC),^[19] American

Nurses Foundation,^[20] Johns Hopkins Berman Institute of Bioethics,^[21] Advancing Expert Care,^[22] CareSearch,^[23] National Coalition for Hospice and Palliative Care,^[24] National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization^[25] and VitalTalk.^[26] Most importantly for the current time, some of the organizations also provided resources specific to the current COVID-19 pandemic.^[19,22,24-26] The depth of resources available accelerated the process of integrating palliative care content into the curriculum. New educational resources were developed only if existing resources were not sufficient to address curricular gaps.

3.3 Integrate teaching and learning activities

Varied palliative care learning resources have been incorporated into the curriculum which includes sequential lectures, interactive online presentations, case studies, practice scenarios with identified palliative care needs, readings, and interprofessional palliative care simulations across multiple courses. The sample palliative care content included in each different track of the AP-DNP program has been attached as an example (see the Appendix). The resources and palliative care contents were included in the Doctor of Nursing Practice – Advanced Practice (DNP-AP) program and distributed throughout other graduate programs and among all students and faculty. Additionally, school-wide, monthly palliative care lectures, and palliative care faculty and student interest groups helped enhance the efforts.

3.4 Evaluate content and learning

To identify the impact of this initiative, faculty members reviewed and revised course content annually examining curricular needs, learning outcomes, and student course feedback. To evaluate student learning, the Palliative Care Quiz for Nursing (PCQN)^[27] for palliative care knowledge and Palliative Care Self-Efficacy Scale (PCSES)^[28] for palliative care confidence were identified as appropriate tools. Results of the outcome of the project are published elsewhere. The project was successful in preparing more than 600 nurses from graduate programs with advanced practice palliative care knowledge and skills over 4 years of the project period. The university continues to work with program directors, track coordinators, instructional designers, and palliative care faculty for the curriculum update as well as the sustainability of the project activities and goals.

3.5 Disseminate resources and findings

As part of being an educational organization that is committed to advancing practice and, not only at local but more broadly at state, national, and international levels, the project activities, resources, and findings were disseminated to a wider audience through various, local, state, national and international conferences and publications.^[14] One of the dissemination approaches used included an annual palliative care workshop, symposium, or conference with an aim to provide contemporary palliative care knowledge and skills for students, faculties, and clinicians. Further, all the palliative care resources identified and developed were shared with internal and external education, practice and community partners from the school website. Lastly, the project team collaborated with ELNEC and shared these resources using the newsletter, ELNEC Connection to ELNEC Trainers, to various palliative care organizations and projects, governmental agencies and media representatives including more

than 600 undergraduate and 200 graduate nursing programs.

4. DISCUSSION

We developed a framework to integrate advanced practice palliative care content within our School of Nursing curriculum. The framework highlights a cyclical approach to disseminate palliative care content throughout the program with individual courses building on one another and the utility of the available resources in curriculum development.

There are various approaches to integrating advanced practice palliative care competencies in the nursing curriculum. There has been increasing acknowledgment of the need for palliative care education in nursing and has identified several initiatives on developing palliative care courses and modules in nursing education.^[29,30] The framework developed and utilized in this study emphasizes the importance of an approach that threads palliative care principles and skills throughout the program regardless of area of specialization.^[31] Palliative care content has a greater effect when learned and used over weeks, involving the mixture of didactic methodologies and application of knowledge and skills with practical experiences.^[32] Consistently applying palliative care principles affects nursing outcomes in varieties of domains of person-centered care.^[33]

Integration of palliative care principles and skills in the curriculum appear daunting because of lack of time and space in the curriculum; funding support; palliative care prepared faculty; resources to teach; and specialty palliative care sites.^[30] However, there are several existing useful palliative and end-of-life care resources and educational materials which can help ameliorate these concerns.^[14] Identification, adaptation, and use of these existing resources could be a critical first step in integrating palliative care into nursing education with limited effort and support and to train the nursing workforce.^[14] The undergraduate and graduate palliative care competencies identified by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing and ELNEC could be a starting point.^[9,10] The adaptation of multifaceted learning materials and approaches identified from the online search^[14] facilitated the palliative care content development process and allowed nursing students to develop cognitive skills for effective palliative care decision-making.

Quality palliative care is and will always be the priority to meet the needs of an aging population and with the rising medical advancements along with pediatric long-term care conditions such as children diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis or Sickle Cell Anemia. Specifically, those who live with serious chronic conditions often find themselves, or their families, bouncing in and out of the healthcare system and struggling

with the individualized care they need to maintain quality of life. Together with the other members of the healthcare team, nurses can help establish decision-making processes considering patient and family preferences, physiological realities and individualized care needs.^[34] Nurses are the health professionals who spend the majority of their time with patients and their family members. Nurses can enhance the palliative care practice which builds on many skills nurses use every day. From understanding the pathophysiology of disease, pain and symptom management, counseling and communication skills to advance care planning all these activities helps care for patients in need of palliative care. Advanced practice nurses are unique and in a strong position to effectively advance palliative care partnerships, thus improving patients' and families' quality of life, reducing healthcare costs, and increasing the overall well-being of all including healthcare providers.^[34] COVID-19 pandemic has more highlighted the need for palliative care^[4,33] and the role of advanced practice nurses in providing holistic care addressing physical, emotional, spiritual and social aspects of patients' and families' needs. Hence, it is essential that nursing education prepares graduates^[35] with advanced practice palliative care competencies, required for the delivery of quality evidence-based palliative care for all patients in all settings.

5. CONCLUSION

The Framework for Integrating Palliative Care in Nursing Education consists of five specific processes: Assessment of

curricular needs and goals; Identification and development of resources; Integration of teaching and learning activities; Evaluation of content and learning; and Dissemination of resources and findings. Supportive organizational structure and an academic-practice partnership are valuable infrastructures for these processes. The educational initiatives integrating palliative care into nursing education may increase the advanced practice nursing workforce with essential palliative care competencies to provide clinical leadership in a rapidly changing healthcare delivery system.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

The authors declared that they have no conflict of interest.

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