

Marie Curie Cancer Care Research Programme - Project Grant

Project details

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Understanding the role of nurses in decisions to use anticipatory prescriptions to manage symptoms and distress in the last days of life: a prospective community based case study using mixed methods

Duration of project: 24 months

Proposed start date: 1 September 2011 (TBC)

Budget: £163,760

Abstract

Background There is little research into community nurses' roles in end of life decisions. The issue of nurses' roles in sedation in end of life care (i.e. the implementation of medical prescribing in anticipation of distress) has emerged from an international study of continuous sedation in end of life care. This proposal addresses the area of 'establishing an evidence base for care, during the final hours and days, across a range of conditions'.

Aim To determine the roles and experiences of community nurses in end of life medication decisions, using sedation in end of life care as an exemplar.

Objectives

- To examine community nurses' decisions to use medications prescribed in anticipation of anxiety, delirium and other difficult symptoms among patients at the end of life.
- To examine how community nurses work with doctors and pharmacists in using medication at the end of life.
- To understand the views and experiences of community nurses and staff working in primary and long term care (GPs, community pharmacists and care home staff) about end of life medication and the ethical / practical issues faced.
- To shed light on the ways in which medication management in the last days of life facilitates or constrains care at home (or nursing home) at the time of death.
- To work with service users and stakeholders to make recommendations for policy, practice and education.

Methods A mixed method study in two contrasting cancer networks with 4 phases:

- A review of research in community nurses' roles, views and experiences of end of life care and decisions.
- Ethnographies in the case study locations with purposively sampled community nursing teams (n=4; 2 in each location) and nursing homes (n=4; 2 in each location), interviews with nurses, prescribing doctors and community pharmacists (up to a total of 40).
- A survey of community nurses and nursing home nurses.
- A stakeholder workshop to develop recommendations for practice, education and policy.

How we will use the results of this research

- Recommendations for best practice for team working in management of symptoms in the last days of life.
- Publishing a framework for practice, complementing current EAPC framework for therapeutic sedation.
- Informing evidence based teaching for example by contributing to the freely accessible 'e' learning site in East Midlands Cancer Network.
- Development of public/ patient information, in collaboration with users.