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Awareness, knowledge and attitude of health care workers about palliative care services in a Nigerian tertiary health facility

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Introduction & Aim: Palliative care has become an area of special expertise within medicine, surgery, nursing, social work, pharmacy, chaplaincy and other disciplines. However, advances in palliative care have not yet been integrated effectively into standard clinical practice. There is an increasing acknowledgment of the inadequacies in the care of dying persons and their families. The goal of improving the quality of palliative care services is a challenge to the very integrity of health care professionals and the health care system. In our health care facility however, chronic pain and palliative unit is a part of anesthesia and intensive care department established May 2016. The modality of management of palliative care patients in our health facility is a comprehensive approach where different specialists work together as a team in overall patient care. The aim of this study is to provide a pragmatic solution to none or late referral (of patients that may benefit from palliative care) from other departments. However to establish the level of awareness, knowledge and attitude of the tertiary institution staff members as regards palliative care services rendered in the health care facility. It is hoped that this survey will make a significant contribution to improving the plight of dying patients and their families in our health facility.

Method: This was a descriptive study based on the assessment of the level of awareness, knowledge and attitude of different cadre of staff of the state tertiary facility. The study was carried out for a period of six months February-July 2018 (both data collection and analysis). Data was collected using self-administered questionnaires. Ethical considerations were ensured. Data analysis was done with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 Chicago IL (U.S.A).

Result: A total of 400 questionnaires were administered during the period of study. 92 were returned unfilled, while a total of 308 agreed to participate in the study. The study showed that majority of the participants had good knowledge about chronic pain and palliative care. Majority (213, 69.16 %) of the participants have heard about the term Hospice and Palliative Care before. Majority (124, 58.21%) heard about the term at the inauguration ceremony of the unit, meanwhile others came across the term through social media [Television/Radio/Internet (34, 15.96%)], information materials (20, 9.39%), cancer screening facility (19, 8.92%) and from family members (16, 7.52%). Furthermore, majority (274 89.0%) of the participants were willing to support the successful running of Palliative Care services by giving physical (123, 39.94%), emotional (79, 25.65%) or spiritual support (50, 16.23%). Only few were willing to support financially (31, 10.06 %). Many (283, 91.88%) of them would prefer to refer dying/terminally ill patients to the hospital for care till death comes.

Conclusion: Despite the fact that larger proportions of the participants have appreciable level of knowledge and awareness about palliative care services and also willing to support the successful running of services, majority still prefer to refer mainly dying/terminally ill patients for the services.

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