



Intersecting evidence needs: Supporting those providing palliative care for older Australians

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Introduction

Australia's population is ageing. Life expectancy has increased for all age groups. It is anticipated that by 2026, 19% of Australia's population will be over 65 and 2.5% over 85. [1] This also means that many people are approaching the end of their lives older, with multiple co-morbidities and in diverse social circumstances. [2, 3]

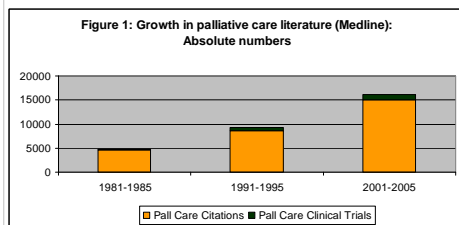
Palliative care and geriatric medicine are therefore likely to share a common set of evidence needs in caring for older people at the end of their life.

Given an increasing focus on research in both palliative care and aged care in the last ten years, there is a growing body of research evidence that can help guide clinical practice and health and social care delivery.

Role of Evidence

Evidence-based medicine aims to help health professionals and their patients make choices about the most effective care drawing upon what is known from the available research evidence. There is an expectation that practice will accord with what is known.

However being able to identify, retrieve and process the increasing volume of research evidence is challenging. A recent study has shown a three-fold increase in all palliative care literature between 1981-1985 and 2001-2005 and a nine-fold increase in publication of palliative care clinical trials in the same period. [4] (Figure 1)



Further, in 2005, 1,985 journals published 6,983 palliative care items. Keeping up to date with this literature alone would mean reading 19 articles a day. [5]

Mechanisms such as the CareSearch website that facilitate access to literature and evidence and that support health professionals in using research evidence are therefore extremely important.

Aim

- To provide quality information on palliative care for all health professionals and health consumers
- To provide specific information on palliative care for older people, those with dementia, and palliative care in residential aged care facilities
- To facilitate access to evidence on palliative care for older people

Method

A Scoping Study on the role and feasibility of an online network of palliative care resources and information was completed in 2004. In 2006, a project to develop an Australian Knowledge Network in palliative care began. Its purpose was to create a one stop shop of information and practical resources for all those providing palliative care or affected by palliative care.

A public health approach to palliative care recognises that care must respond to all community needs and expectations including those with particular socio-economic or cultural characteristics. [6, 7] These groups include older people, those with dementia and those in residential age care facilities.

This approach has influenced the architecture of the website and shaped the development of website's resources and functions.

Defined quality processes act as checks for material included within the site and as principles to support evidence based practice. Material is reviewed by experts from the field and relevant agencies.

The work of the project is overseen by Knowledge Network Management Group and informed by a National Advisory Group.

Results

The following resources are included in the website at www.caresearch.com.au

Clinical Practice

There are pages for clinicians on palliative care considerations for specific groups such as older people, those with dementia and aged care facilities. They provide an overview of the evidence and links to resources and other sources of information.

Finding evidence

The CareSearch Review Collection compiles details on palliative care systematic reviews and structured literature reviews. It includes reviews in the following categories relevant to aged care – older people (37 reviews); dementia (19 reviews); and site of care (residential aged care) (6 reviews).

Australian conference abstracts, theses and organisational reports dealing with palliative care considerations in aged care can be found by searching the CareSearch Grey Literature database.

Access to the literature and evidence base has been facilitated by the experimental development of a palliative care filter. [8] PubMed Topic searches combine this filter with topic searches such as "aged", "aged care facilities" and "dementia". Clicking on the topic causes the search to be run in the PubMed database, one of the world's largest biomedical literature resources constantly adds new articles.

Patient and Carer Pages

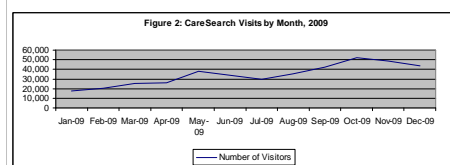
Pages for patients, carers and their family provide information to help in care and decision making.

GP pages

A specific set of page supports GPs who are frequently involved in the care of older Australians.

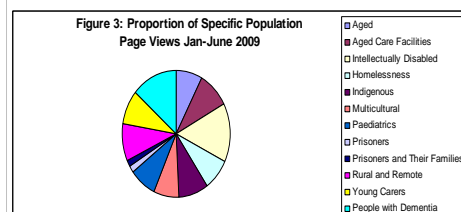
Usage

Web metrics show that these online resources are well used. Since its launch in May 2008, there has been a rapid growth in the use of the CareSearch website. (Figure 2) Monthly visits are now between 40,000 and 50,000.



Page view analysis indicates that both pages for health professionals and page for consumers are being viewed. There are around 190,00 page views each month.

Each individual Specific Population page is viewed between 4 and 14 times per day. Figure 3 shows the relative interest in the topics according to page views.



Each individual PubMed Topic Search is being accessed daily as is each individual Review Collection topic.

Conclusion

Access to the literature and evidence base for palliative care aged care has been enhanced through the availability of the CareSearch website.

For further information on the CareSearch website please email Jennifer.Tieman@flinders.edu.au

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