

Project team

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The Project

There is an increasing interest in evidence-based practice in palliative care. In order to have evidence-based practice, evidence must be found and applied.

This project recognised:

- that information and evidence from Australian palliative care was hard to locate
- that not all relevant information and evidence is held on the formal electronic databases
- that information is a vital component of evidence based practice and that good practice includes making information available
- that opportunities to enhance skills related to searching and evaluating need to be provided to those in the palliative care community

The palliative Evidence Based Practice Project sought to improve the information about palliative care and palliative service provision available to both the clinical and research communities in Australia.

Finding the literature

Literature Databases

A searchable literature database has been developed recognising that much of the literature around palliative care is:

- not easily available,
- not published, or
- missing from existing databases.

Four main sources of literature not readily available were identified.

1. Conference abstracts

Australian conference proceedings from 1980 were hand searched, the abstracts were identified and evaluated by experienced palliative care clinicians. The full citation details and the abstract provided within the conference proceedings have been catalogued and included in the database. The evaluations of the abstracts are currently being attached for viewing by users of the project website.

2. Theses and treatises

Libraries throughout Australia were approached regarding palliative care theses and treatises by higher degree students. All documents were catalogued, along with the full citation and abstract/summary/main findings.

3. Uncatalogued journal publications

Twelve of the main palliative care journals were hand searched, and compared against electronic databases (Ovid Medline, Embase, PsycINFO and CINAHL). The journal articles which were published but not subsequently indexed in the databases were catalogued along with the full citation and abstract.

4. Grey literature

Government organisations were approached requesting any relevant palliative care grey literature in the form of reports, papers etc. All documents received were catalogued along with the full citation, executive summary and other publishing information.

These four sources of literature form the 4 databases offered within the project website.

These databases contain full citations and can be searched by author, title, keyword, and year. The search results are displayed along with an abstract (where available). The citation details and abstract can be printed by the user.

The databases thus provide access to palliative care literature that is currently not easily available to clinicians and researchers. Used in conjunction with the electronic databases the user now has access to a comprehensive range of literature pertaining to palliative care. This information can be used to support or enhance clinical practice, support research activities, and improve the evidence base for palliative care in Australia.

Finding the literature

Searching the literature

The majority of published palliative care literature is available through the medical electronic databases, but retrieving information from these databases can be time consuming, often fruitless and requires knowledge of the typical search terms likely to yield results.

Two services are available through the project website:

1. A modular system of common search topics for palliative care for the user to build a search strategy for use within Ovid Medline. The strategies have been developed by a medical librarian, and are being updated and expanded regularly. The strategy can be printed for later use within Ovid Medline. This service is aimed at assisting users to learn more about effective searching within the Ovid Medline environment.

2. Similar search strategies are built for use within the Pubmed environment. This search will jump the user into Pubmed where the search will then be undertaken and the results made available. This service is aimed at assisting users to locate information, without necessarily learning how to build a search.

A specific palliative care filter is currently undergoing vigorous sensitivity and specificity testing to ensure that relevant palliative care articles within the general literature can be located.

Generating Evidence

Research

There is likely to be a need to enhance the evidence base in palliative care which will require further research on various topics. The capacity to generate research depends on the skills and knowledge of researchers and the availability of appropriate resources. One of the components of the website is a research area which will enable clinicians and researchers to access facilities and resources.

A platform for the on-line entry of data for multi-site studies enables researchers to become involved in such research, and make use of a customisable system for data entry. This facility is password protected with inbuilt data validation tools, and the data can be downloaded for analysis.

Further services offered will be:

- the ability to register research projects
- the uploading of documents such as study protocols and procedure manuals
- general research tools such as information on ethics and research techniques and resources

Supporting Practice

Service Models

A selection of audit tools developed and validated for palliative care are provided, with the appropriate references. Information on models of service delivery is being developed.

Further developments will include an on-line audit facility where services can contribute to audit data. Contributors can compare data on their own service against a summary norm of all submitted information. This will develop a benchmarking capacity for palliative care.

Resources

A specific resource section has been developed. This site currently includes:

- **Hotpicks**, containing a commentary from a reviewer on an article, report or research study with specific merit and its contribution to the field.
- **Weblinks**, where the user can link to useful websites related to palliative care and/or evidence based practice.
- **Newsletters**, to keep abreast of changes, events and feedback.

The Focus

The purpose of the Evidence Based Project was to ensure that the coverage of palliative care information was as comprehensive as possible and that the palliative care community could access this information.

The intended audience for this work was palliative care clinicians, researchers and service planners.

Aims

- To collect published but uncatalogued and unpublished literature in palliative care, evaluate its quality and disseminate summaries
- To develop tools that support evidence based practice in palliative care, with attention to searching strategies, validity, generalisability and audit
- To develop an electronic home for Australian palliative care research that supports research development, execution and multi-centre collaboration

Outcomes

There are two main outcomes from this project. Firstly, the project has led to the creation of a living anthology of Australian palliative information. The second outcome was the development of an accessible database through the Caresearch website.

www.caresearch.com.au

It provides the basis for developing, building and expanding the evidence base for clinical practice in palliative care in Australia. The resources provide the forum to build palliative care research capacity.

A searchable anthology of literature for palliative care is held for public use, free of charge.

The project has received further funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing to expand and enhance the website until April 2005.

Acknowledgements

The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing provided the funding for this project.

Morton Blacketer developed the website, graphic design by CDAA.