

BULGARIA



Population: 7,385,367

Current Directory:

Printed version

Online version

None identified x

Key Contact/National Association

Key contact:

Irena Jivkova Hadjiiska Bildireva,
Administrative Coordinator,
Bulgarian Association of Palliative Care,
National Oncological Centre Hospital,
Unit of Psychosocial Care and Pain Control,
6 Plovdivsko pole str.,
1756 Sofia,
Bulgaria.
Telephone: 00359 2 9714898 338
Email: ihadjiiska@yahoo.com

National Association:

Dr Nikolay Radev Yordanov,
Head of the palliative care department/
Secretary of the Bulgarian Association of
Palliative Care,
Department of Palliative Care, Interregional
Cancer Hospital – Vratsa,
Boulevard “Vtori Juni” No68,
3000 Vratsa,
Bulgaria.
Telephone: ++359887218740
Email: dr_yordanoff@abv.bg

Palliative Care Services

NK = not known

Number of Palliative Care Services

	Inpatient Palliative Care Units	Hospices	Consultant Teams in Hospitals	Home Care Teams	Day Centres	Total
Adult/Children	0	16	0	25	0	41
Paediatric only	0	0	0	0	0	0
				Inpatient Palliative Care Units/hospices	Chronic Hospitals /Nursing Homes	Total
Number of beds allocated to adult palliative care inpatients				NK	NK	NK
				Adults	Children	Total
Number of Bereavement Support Teams				0	0	0

Comments/Sources

- There are several forms of palliative care provision in Bulgaria: social patronage; homes for elders; hospitals for active treatment; hospices registered on the Law of the Treatment Institutions.
- The number of hospices is an estimate only, as there is no clear distinction between hospices and homes for medico-social care and standards of good medical practice. There are no regulations relating to the organization and activities of the hospices and they are not popular as a form of care for dying patients.

- According to Bulgarian law, there are 59 hospices registered on the Law of the Treatment Institutions (this information is gathered from the Regional Health Centres in Bulgaria). There is no contact with 20 of them and seven are not operational (but are registered). There are no statistics about palliative care available on a national level.
- There is no palliative care provision for children in Bulgaria. Children with incurable illness are cared for at the Specialized Hospital for Treatment of Children with Onco-Hematological Diseases (the only hospital of this type in Bulgaria and the consultative centre for the Republic).
- There are no specialized bereavement support teams in the cancer hospitals. However, there are a number of psychologists and psychiatrists at the psychiatric hospitals who are available to provide such support.

[Survey of Alpha Research (2003)]

[Survey of the Bulgarian Association of Palliative Care]

[Specialized Hospital for Treatment of Children with Onco-Haematological Diseases]

[Bulgarian Psychiatric Association]

[EAPC Palliative Care Facts in Europe Questionnaire 2005]

Adult Palliative Care Population

NK	of patients receiving palliative care have a cancer diagnosis	
NK	of patients receiving palliative care have other incurable conditions	
	Cancer	(n)
Number of patients who die at home	NK	NK
Number of patients who die in a general hospital	NK	NK
Number of patients who die in other healthcare institutions	NK	NK

Comments/Sources

[Bulgarian Association of Palliative Care]

[National Centre for Health Information]

[Bulgarian National Cancer Registry]

[EAPC Palliative Care Facts in Europe Questionnaire 2005]

Palliative Care Workforce Capacity

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Physicians	NK	NK	NK
Nurses	NK	NK	NK
Social Workers	NK	NK	NK
Psychologists	NK	NK	NK
Physiotherapists	NK	NK	NK
Occupational Therapists	NK	NK	NK
Spiritual/Faith leaders	NK	NK	NK
Volunteers	NK	NK	60

Comments/Sources

- There is no information available about the number of health professionals working in palliative care.
- The number of volunteers is an estimate only.

[Bulgarian Association of Palliative Care]

[EAPC Palliative Care Facts in Europe Questionnaire 2005]

Funding of palliative care services

Total number of palliative care services funded by the government	0
Total number of palliative care services funded privately or by NGO's	11

Comments/Sources

- There is no information available about the number of palliative care services that are supported by a combination of private and public funds.

[Bulgarian Association of Palliative Care]

[EAPC Palliative Care Facts in Europe Questionnaire 2005]

Perceived use of main opioids in palliative care

Order of frequency	Opioid	Estimated cost per month (€)
First opioid	Morphine	27.80 \$
Second opioid	Durogesic	109.88 \$
Third opioid	DHC	30.86 \$
Comments/Sources		
[EAPC Palliative Care Facts in Europe Questionnaire 2005]		

Key issues and challenges

- Shortage of funding.
- Inadequate training of medical teams.
- The medical community still targets its efforts towards disease treatment at any cost, thereby neglecting the patients' quality of life (and the provision of palliative care).
- The difficulty in solving spiritual problems due to the demise of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.
- Strong opioids are supplied only by the Ministry of Health and some bureaucratic obstacles make the supplies irregular.
- There are strict requirements from the police authorities relating to the sale of strong opioids in pharmacies. The cost of the license for selling such drugs is expensive and there is unwillingness on the part of many pharmacies to sell them.
- The cost of the drugs compared to the income of the patient.

[EAPC Palliative Care Euro-Barometer 2005]

Palliative care accreditation

- "There is no specialist accreditation for palliative care professionals in Bulgaria at the present time. There is no specialization in palliative care at the Medical Universities in the country (although some medical colleges offer bachelor degrees for nurses that include courses on palliative care)."

[EAPC Palliative Care Facts in Europe Questionnaire 2005]

Palliative care milestones

- 1992: The first palliative care training course is provided with the help of the Open Society Institute and the George Soros Foundation.
- 1994: An outpatient consulting team specialized in palliative nursing for cancer patients is organised in Sofia.
- 1996: The first centre for controlling cancer pain is founded at the Cancer Hospital (Pleven).
- 1997: The first centre for controlling cancer pain is founded at the Cancer Hospital (Vratsa).
- 1998: The first inpatient hospital based palliative care department is opened at Vratsa.

- 1998: The first pain centre for chronic non-malignant pain is established in Sofia.
- 2001: The National Health Insurance Fund creates a clinical pathway – palliative care for terminal cancer patients – reimbursing 20 days stay in hospital for six consecutive months. Some hospitals create their own teams in order to have a contract with the National Health Insurance Fund.
- 2002: A new law and decree regulating the prescribing, shipping, storing and handling of opioids and other controlled drugs comes into operation, leading to the introduction of many new drugs into everyday practice.
- 2003: The Bulgarian Association of Palliative Care is founded.
- 2003: Medical College (Vratsa), Cancer Hospital (Vratsa), Medical College (Den Helder, Holland), and the MARTA foundation start a project named “*Development of palliative care in Bulgaria*”. Its main target is to prepare future teachers in palliative care for four medical colleges in Bulgaria and to prepare a textbook in palliative care nursing for Bulgaria and Holland.
- 2003: The Bulgarian chapter of IASP is established.
- 2004: The first national palliative care conference with foreign participants dedicated to pain control takes place in Bansko.
- 2004: It is established that several private hospices are working without a contract with the NHIF because of some legal obstacles; within the Hospital Law such structures do not exist as hospices. In order to continue their activities some ‘hospices’ became part of other hospitals.
- 2004: A group of specialists working in the field of palliative care creates national palliative care guidelines (upon a written order from the Minister of Health).
- 2004: The Bulgarian Association of Palliative Care mark the publication of the Council of Europe (2003) report on palliative care (Recommendation 24 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the organisation of palliative care) by translating the document into Bulgarian. As a result of this, the Bulgarian Ministry of Health authorizes a committee to create Bulgarian standards of palliative care.
- 2005: An international meeting of the International Association for the Study of Pain takes place in Sofia.
- 2005: Medical College (Vratsa) provides the first Master’s degree in palliative care (officially approved by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Bulgarian Medical Academy for Postgraduate Nursing).

[EAPC Palliative Care Euro-Barometer 2005]

Health policy

- The establishment of the NHIF and the clinical pathway has resulted in a great change in the attitude of Bulgarian society towards palliative care.
- The Bulgarian Association of Palliative Care has not participated in any way in the Council of Europe discussions about euthanasia (the Marty Report).
- At the current time, there are no initiatives in Bulgaria that seek the legalisation of euthanasia or assisted suicide. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and Christian tradition do not allow life to be taken (even in the form of euthanasia). The problem is not discussed because both the medical community and society in general are not ready yet to discuss it.

[EAPC Palliative Care Euro-Barometer 2005]



EAPC Task Force on the development of Palliative Care in Europe

References

Clark, D., and Wright, M. (2003) Transitions in End of Life Care. Hospice and related developments in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003, pp. 37-44. Bulgaria.

http://www.eolc-observatory.net/global_analysis/bulgaria.htm

Gancheva A. National reports Europe: Bulgaria. *Eur J Palliat Care*. 1994;1(2):N1.

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