

RESULTS OF A PILOT ONLINE PALLIATIVE CARE (PC) COURSE

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The PallCare EdNet Pilot online course was developed to explore interdisciplinary, interactive online learning. Methods: 41, mainly rural-based, primary practitioners (15 physicians, 15 nurses, 4 pharmacists, 6 family medicine registrars) enrolled in the 3 month-long course that was delivered entirely online (WebCT).. Learners engaged in asynchronous case-based discussions in 5 modules, each 2 wks long. Learners were assigned to large & small groups; some groups were interdisciplinary. Pre-, mid- and post course surveys, and mid-and post course focus groups were conducted. Results: 35/41 participants completed the course and 80% felt it met their needs. There were significant improvements in knowledge domains. Learners spent an average of 2-4 hours per week online. Physicians were in general supportive of interdisciplinary learning, but less so than other disciplines. They expressed some discomfort with collaborative learning. Comfort levels with the technology improved over time. Most learners printed the reading material. Attitudinal topics generated more substantive interactions. Faculty expressed tension between facilitative versus didactic roles. Discussion: Collaborative online learning provides an opportunity for distance/distributed learning in palliative care. Successful implementation requires: i) selecting applications for specific needs; ii) new evaluation paradigms; iii) multi-sector collaboration; iv) low learner to faculty ratio; v) faculty and learner training & support; vi) attention to nurturing a learning community; vii) a shift in learning paradigms with emphasis on reflective learning; and viii) sound instructional design. Impact on competencies should be assessed in future.