

CORE DOCUMENTATION FOR PALLIATIVE CARE UNITS - STRUCTURAL QUALITY AND OUTCOME

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Introduction: A core documentation for palliative care units has been developed in cooperation with the German Association for Palliative Medicine and the German Cancer Society since 1996.

Methods: The core documentation included patient-, disease- and therapy-related informations at the time of admission and discharge. The core documentation has been evaluated in two phases, data from the second phase related to structural quality and outcome are presented in this study.

Results: Forty-four of the 65 palliative care units existing in Germany in 2000 participated in the study, representing 72,2% of the palliative care beds available in Germany. Half of the patients (47,9%) were admitted from home care to the palliative care units. Of these patients, 45,6% returned to home care after inpatient treatment. The percentage of patients who died in the palliative care wards was higher for patients referred from another hospital (59,0%) or from other departments of the own hospital (51,7%) than from patients admitted from home care (42,1%).

Pain and symptom control were increased during inpatient treatment, as were level of care available at home, psychological stability and patient satisfaction, but to a lesser degree. Level of care needed and performance status decreased during inpatient treatment. Outcome parameters showed no relationship with the structural quality of the palliative care unit for the whole group of patients as well as for patients discharged. No significant differences were seen for units with higher ratios of nurses per bed or for units providing chaplains, psychologists, physiotherapists or social workers.

Conclusions: The results of this study emphasize that specific instruments have to be developed for quality assurance in palliative medicine. The values assigned to each of the different domains of palliative care such as symptom control or communication with patients and relatives should be defined as a prerequisite for the development of these instruments.