

Title: Closing the Palliative Care Skills Gap by Providing Palliative Care Seminars for Physician Assistant Students

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Statement of the problem: There is a shortage of health care providers with primary palliative care skills.

Background: Studies show that health professions students exposed to palliative care education feel more equipped to care for the dying patient. While accreditation standards for Physician Assistant (PA) education state that the curriculum must include preclinical instruction on palliative and end-of-life-care, no specific competencies are specified. However, there are recommendations for specific core competencies for nursing and medical students, as well as resident physicians.

Purpose: The purpose of this education initiative is to introduce PA students to principles of palliative care through a seminar consisting of teaching modules entitled *A Death Café*, *Palliative Care Overview*, and *Goals of Care*.

Objective: To demonstrate increased student comfort and competence while implementing palliative care principles and goals of care conversations.

Methods: After coordination with the Dean, the Medical Director, and Program Director of the PA school at the Francis Marion University School of Health Sciences, a mandatory Palliative Care Seminar was held November 21, 2017. Thirty students participated in the interactive *Death Café*, *Palliative Care Overview* lecture, and Reader's Theater style *Goals of Care* conversations. Changes in attitudes were measured by Frommelt's Attitudes Toward Care of the Dying Scale Form-B. Data were analyzed using the paired Student's t test.

Results: Significant improvement in attitudes as measured by Frommelt's scale occurred on 9 of the 30 questions ($p < 0.05$). Qualitative improvement as judged by participant feedback suggested a positive response to the seminar format.

Conclusions: The PA students changed their attitudes towards palliative care in response to the seminar. The key stakeholders at the university may now recognize the need for palliative care training for PA students and include it in their curriculum.