
POSTER ABSTRACT

What knowledge and skills do community volunteers need to signpost palliative care needs to professionals? A qualitative study

23rd International Conference on Integrated Care, Antwerp, Flanders, 22-24 May 2023

Sabet Van Steenberghe¹², Steven Vanderstichelen¹²³⁴, Else Gien Statema¹³, Luc Deliens¹²³⁴, Sarah Dury⁴⁵, Kenneth Chambaere¹²⁴

1: End-of-Life Care Research Group - Universiteit Gent/Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Gent, Oost-Vlaanderen, Belgium

2: Department of Public Health and Primary Care, Ghent University, Gent, Oost-Vlaanderen, Belgium

3: Department of Family Medicine and Chronic Care, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussel, Vlaams, Brabant, Belgium

4: Compassionate Communities Centre of Expertise, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussel, Vlaams, Brabant, Belgium

5: Department of Educational Sciences, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussel, Vlaams Brabant, Belgium

Background: Volunteers often notice palliative care (PC) needs that healthcare professionals (HCP) and family caregivers miss, potentially playing an important signposting role. It is unknown what particular knowledge and skills are lacking and required to optimally fulfil this role in community homecare.

Aims: To explore the desired and required knowledge and skills for volunteers to recognize, describe and communicate PC needs to HCPs.

Methods: A qualitative study design with 7 focus groups (15 community volunteers, 20 HCP's) and 10 in-depth interviews (6 community residents with PC needs, 4 informal caregivers).

Results: We identified 5 themes in our data: (1) the organization of community-based volunteer work, (2) the volunteer, (3) the resident with PC needs, (4) the volunteer – community resident relationship, and (5) communication/sharing of information with HCPs. Knowledge about types of PC needs and about community resources were considered important. Examples of required skills are: willingness to listen, being present, responding empathically, being able to relate to the person they visit, balancing personal distance and proximity, starting and maintaining non-threatening conversations, and building a relationship of trust with the resident. Insight into missing skills and knowledge was obtained by discussed experienced difficulties with regard to learning from other volunteers, finding the right information to help residents, exploring care signals with the resident and making their presence known and contributing to professionals.

Conclusion: In order to fulfill their signposting role, it is important that volunteers have knowledge about PC needs and community resources. Ideally, they have good relational skills, communication skills, observation skills and skills that enable them to provide practical help. Volunteers should make their presence and role known to professionals and find out what they can mean for each other.

Funding: Flemish Cancer Fund