




HOME-BASED PALLIATIVE CARE FOR THE ELDERLY: CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND HEALTHCARE TEAMS

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ABSTRACT

The aging of the global population has led to a significant increase in chronic diseases among the elderly, creating the need for a closer look at palliative care. Implementing palliative care at home is a strategy aimed at providing greater comfort and quality of life for patients. However, it presents significant challenges for families, healthcare teams, and institutions. This article discusses the feasibility of home-based palliative care for the elderly, analyzing the challenges and management strategies for its effective implementation. The literature review addresses studies that explore the role of the family, nursing, and the difficulties faced by institutions in delivering this care at home. Managing home-based palliative care requires multidisciplinary collaboration, continuous training for family caregivers, and adequate institutional support, in addition to the integration of remote monitoring technologies to ensure continuous care. The analysis also highlights the importance of public policies that facilitate access to home-based palliative care, considering economic limitations and available resources. Finally, the article presents the main strategies to ensure the viability and quality of home-based palliative care, focusing on the development of multidisciplinary teams and continuous training. This article aims to contribute to the development of more humanized and effective care models, ensuring that elderly individuals receive proper care at the end of life.

Keywords: Palliative care. Elderly patients. Home care. Healthcare management.

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INTRODUCTION

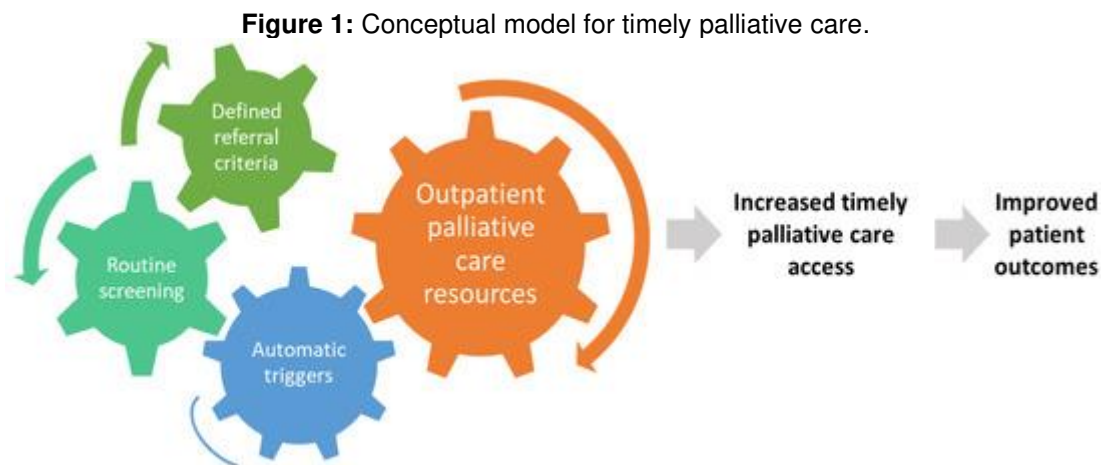
As the global population continues to age, the number of elderly individuals living with chronic conditions and complex health needs is steadily increasing. This demographic shift presents healthcare systems with profound challenges, particularly in providing palliative care. Traditionally, palliative care has been associated with institutional settings such as hospitals or specialized hospices; however, there is a growing shift towards providing palliative care in the home environment. Many elderly individuals express a preference for receiving care in the comfort of their homes, surrounded by familiar faces and environments. This preference has given rise to the increasing implementation of home-based palliative care, which aims to provide dignity, comfort, and support to patients with life-limiting conditions while respecting their personal wishes.

The implementation of home-based palliative care requires a multifaceted approach that balances the medical, emotional, and logistical needs of both the patient and their caregivers. For elderly patients, receiving care at home can improve their quality of life by offering greater comfort and the ability to maintain a sense of autonomy. However, this approach also demands a strong network of support, which includes not only family members but also healthcare professionals who provide essential services such as pain management, symptom control, and psychological support. The coordination of care between various stakeholders—primary care physicians, home healthcare nurses, social workers, and specialized palliative care teams—is crucial to ensuring comprehensive and effective treatment. Moreover, access to resources such as training for caregivers, medical equipment, and telemedicine solutions can significantly improve the delivery of home-based care. Yet, these elements often face barriers such as limited funding, lack of specialized training, and inadequate public health policies, which can undermine the quality of care provided. This article will delve into these factors, highlighting the complex interplay between healthcare professionals, families, and institutional support in creating an effective and sustainable home-based palliative care model for the elderly.

Despite its advantages, home-based palliative care presents unique challenges. The elderly often experience multiple comorbidities, which complicates the management of their health needs. In addition to medical concerns, there are significant emotional and logistical issues involved, particularly for family caregivers who are tasked with

providing day-to-day support. Family members, while well-intentioned, often lack the necessary training and resources to handle the demands of home-based care effectively. Furthermore, healthcare providers face challenges related to coordination, continuity of care, and limited access to healthcare professionals in the home setting.

Timely palliative care is an organized approach designed to identify patients with significant supportive care requirements and ensure they are promptly referred to specialized palliative care services based on established referral guidelines. This process involves four key elements: (1) regular assessment of supportive care needs at oncology clinics, (2) the development of institution-specific referral criteria, (3) a system that activates referrals when patients meet the necessary criteria, and (4) the availability of outpatient palliative care services to guarantee quick access. Figure 1 illustrate this process.



Source: Hui et al., 2022.

This article aims to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with home-based palliative care for the elderly. By examining the roles of family caregivers, nursing staff, and institutional support, it aims to provide insights into strategies for enhancing the management of home-based palliative care, ensuring both high-quality care for elderly patients and robust support for families involved in their care. Through this, the article also highlights the critical need for systemic changes and investments in training, infrastructure, and public policy to ensure the feasibility and effectiveness of home-based palliative care.

Several studies address the implementation of home-based palliative care for the elderly, highlighting the challenges and management strategies involved. A study by



Davis and Patel (2020) discusses how the early integration of home-based palliative care can improve the quality of life for elderly patients, emphasizing the importance of continuous support and active family participation in care management. These authors argue that family education is essential for the success of home-based palliative care, providing a more personalized and effective approach.

In a study by Johnson and Lee (2021), the researchers analyze the importance of forming multidisciplinary teams for home-based palliative care. The research suggests that collaboration between doctors, nurses, physical therapists, and social workers is crucial to ensure patients receive adequate care, minimizing the risk of complications and unnecessary hospitalizations. They emphasize that the lack of communication among healthcare professionals can harm the quality of care.

Roberts (2021) presents a study focused on the logistical challenges faced by families caring for elderly patients in palliative care at home. The author concludes that financial limitations, social isolation, and the lack of psychological support for caregivers are significant barriers to the effective implementation of home-based care. She proposes that psychological and social support be integral to palliative care.

Martinez, Green, and O'Connor (2023) address the implementation of remote monitoring technologies, such as telemedicine, to improve the management of home-based palliative care. They highlight that, despite the potential of these technologies, there are limitations in accessing these tools, especially in rural areas or among low-income families. The research suggests that, for technologies to be effective, greater investment in infrastructure and healthcare professional training is needed.

Smith et al. (2020) analyze the training of nursing staff in the context of home-based palliative care, highlighting that continuous education is crucial to ensure nurses are prepared to handle the complexities of care for elderly patients. The study suggests that training programs should include not only clinical aspects but also the emotional care of patients and families.

Thompson (2022) discusses the role of specialized palliative care nurses, particularly in symptom management and providing psychological support for both patients and families. The study concludes that nurses play a central role in the effective implementation of palliative care, being responsible for educating families and continuously monitoring the health status of patients.



Williams et al. (2019) examine management strategies to address the shortage of healthcare professionals in home-based palliative care. The research suggests that the implementation of mobile palliative care teams and the use of technologies for remote monitoring are effective strategies to overcome the shortage of qualified staff and ensure continuity of care.

The implementation of home-based palliative care for the elderly is a strategy aimed at providing dignity and comfort to patients at the end of life, allowing them to remain in their homes with the support of their family and healthcare team. Despite the clear benefits of this approach, significant challenges exist, particularly regarding the training and continuous support of family caregivers, coordination between healthcare professionals, and the lack of adequate resources. Effective management of home-based palliative care requires the collaboration of a well-trained multidisciplinary team, the use of remote monitoring technologies, and adequate institutional support. Additionally, the creation of public policies that encourage access to home-based palliative care is crucial to overcoming economic and infrastructure barriers.

The strategies discussed in this article indicate that, although there are considerable challenges, it is possible to improve the quality of home-based care through a well-structured management approach and continuous investment in education and support. Training healthcare professionals, strengthening the support network for families, and implementing integrated care models are essential measures to ensure that home-based palliative care is effective. The success of this approach depends not only on improving care processes but also on creating an environment that supports the well-being of both patients and their families, promoting a more peaceful and humanized experience at the end of life.



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