



MODULE 1

Principles of palliative care

To provide health care that's relevant to community needs, you need to understand the experiences, preferences and care requirements for people with life-limiting illnesses.

OVERVIEW

MODULE 1: Principles of palliative care will help you develop the knowledge and skills needed to provide quality care, across various health care settings, to people with life-limiting illnesses and their families.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

You'll develop an understanding of the social and personal experiences of people with life-limiting illnesses and their families. This module will also cover the core principles of palliative care.

After completing this module, you should be able to:

- analyse the impact historical trends have on community perceptions about death, dying and bereavement in contemporary society
- recognise how your own values and beliefs about death and dying affect your responses and interactions with people with life-limiting illnesses and their families
- describe the core principles of palliative care.

ACTIVITY 1: Factors influencing death & dying**THINKING POINTS**

1. Think about how death is depicted through the media. Consider television programmes, movies, books and magazines.

a) Choose an example and in your notebook describe:

- who is dying?
- where are they dying?
- why are they dying
- who is involved in the scene?

b) In what ways are the media depictions similar or different to your own experiences or observations of where and how people die and how they react to death?

2. What historical developments have been most influential in shaping attitudes and beliefs about death and dying in western societies in the 20th century? Consider factors such as:

- scientific advances
- information technology
- health care developments
- demographic changes
- consumerism

3. Some commentators argue that modern western society is 'death denying' or 'death avoiding'.

Give some examples that would:

a) Support this argument

b) Contradict this argument.

In responding to this question, think about issues such as:

- community and healthcare professionals' perceptions
- the allocation of healthcare resources
- the experiences of people with life-limiting illnesses.

ACTIVITY 2: Individual factors influencing death & dying

THINKING POINTS

1. Think about how you and your immediate family react and respond to death and dying. What cultural or personal factors influenced the way you or your family reacted when someone close to you died? If you haven't experienced the death of someone close to you, consider how you think it would make you feel.

2. Discuss with others their experiences or observations of:

a) Practices associated with death and dying in different cultures, age groups, and religions

b) Differences within the same cultural groups.

3. How do you think your own culture, age, and religion influence the way you will provide care?

ACTIVITY 3: Cultural factors influencing death & dying

THINKING POINTS

1. Describe the key elements of cultural safety.

2. What can you do to avoid stereotypes and ensure that you apply the principles of cultural safety to every individual in your care?

ACTIVITY 4: William's Story



THINKING POINTS

1. William said he thought he had an outside chance of living to a 'ripe old age' and that he doesn't usually think much about dying.

- a) How might such beliefs influence how William responds to a diagnosis of a potential life-limiting illness?

b) What societal and personal factors may have contributed to William's beliefs? Some factors you might like to consider in some detail include:

- scientific developments
- demographic changes
- William's past experience with death
- William's age.

2. How might William's cultural background influence his response to his illness?

3. How might this response differ for a person who comes from a different cultural background?

ACTIVITY 5: Assessing people's needs

THINKING POINTS

1. What are some of the common concerns people facing life-limiting illnesses might have?

2. Refer to the palliative care needs assessment tool. Discuss with others:

a) The key needs that these guidelines will assess

b) How such guidelines can be used in practice.

3. What are some of the physical, psychological and social changes that could make a person with a life-limiting illness feel a loss of control?

4. What are the reasons that people often fear pain and other symptoms even when effective symptom management may be available?

ACTIVITY 6: Understanding quality of life

THINKING POINTS

1. How do you define quality of life?

2. How does your definition compare with those of other students or your family and friends?

3. How might a person's definition of quality of life be similar or different as their illness progresses?

4. Why is it important for health care professionals to understand a person's perception of quality of life and how it changes over time?

5. Assessment and early identification of problems is a feature of palliative care.

a) Within the context of your own discipline's scope of practice, give a specific example of a potential problem that you could identify early.

b) Describe the process you would use to support early identification of the problem.

5. The World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of palliative care states that palliative care 'is applicable early in the course of illness, in conjunction with other therapies that are intended to prolong life, such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy, and includes those investigations needed to better understand and manage distressing clinical complications'.

a) Discuss what is meant by 'early in the course of a life-limiting illness'.

b) How does the WHO palliative care definition fit with your understanding of, and experience with, the concept of palliative care?

ACTIVITY 7: Ethical issues & end of life

THINKING POINTS

1. Refer to the ethical guidelines which inform your professional practice.

a) How would you respond in a situation where a caregiver has asked you not to inform the patient about their illness?

b) How do you respond to a patient who tells you that they have 'had enough' and no longer want treatment?

2. Search some recent literature and identify some definitions of the term 'futile treatment'.

3. In what ways could definitions of futility differ between patients and health professionals, and between different health professionals?

ACTIVITY 8: Who needs palliative care?

THINKING POINTS

1. Review Palliative Care Australia's publication Standards for providing quality palliative care for all Australians and identify the key points distinguishing the following definitions:

- palliative approach
- specialist palliative care provider.

2. How do you determine who has adequate support and who requires the support of a specialist palliative care service? Consider:

a) Issues associated with a person's health needs

b) The personal resources and strengths they can draw from.

ACTIVITY 9: William - One year later



THINKING POINTS

Think about the principles of palliative care that you've reviewed and how they might apply in William's situation.

1. What do you think are William's and Gladys's main concerns at this time?

2. What are the key messages the GP provides in relation to William's future care? How did the GP communicate these messages?

3. How could you improve on this interaction to ensure William and Gladys get optimal support and information about the role of palliative care?

ACTIVITY 10: William's illness progresses



THINKING POINTS

1. What factors influence when specialist palliative care would be helpful for people such as William and Gladys?

2. What are some of the decisions that William and Gladys could need to make as William's disease progresses?

ACTIVITY 11: Palliative Care Australia's Standards**THINKING POINTS**

1. Review Standard 1 of Palliative Care Australia's Standards for providing Quality Palliative Care for all Australians. It states that 'care, decision-making and care planning are each based on a respect for the uniqueness of the patient, their caregiver/s and family'. Reflect on the specific strategies that you, as a beginning health care professional, would apply in your practice to meet this standard when caring for people with life-limiting illnesses and their families?

2. Visit the CareSearch website, select 'Constipation' and 'Spirituality' and review the strongest evidence for both of these topics. Write down the key points from these articles.
