

Primary Palliative Care Education - Curriculum Overview for Faculty

Curriculum Overview

There is a gap between the number of seriously ill Americans who would benefit from high-quality palliative care and the number of clinicians equipped to provide it. As this gap widens, driven by our large, aging population, interest in primary palliative care education for non-palliative care specialists and expansion of the palliative care workforce through formal education for interprofessional providers is growing as well.

The enclosed 9-hour “Primary Palliative Care Education” curriculum aims to prepare clinicians on the front lines of caring for patients and families faced with serious illness with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to practice primary level palliative care. With support from a grant by the Stupski Foundation and drawing on the latest educational and medical literature, this curriculum was developed from the ground up by a highly experienced group of educators representing each of the four core palliative care professions: social worker, nurse, physician, and chaplain. This rigorous interprofessional approach ensures that the latest science and best practice is informed by the emphasis on whole-person care that characterizes palliative care. The curriculum is designed to be delivered *by* teams of interprofessional clinicians *to* interprofessional small groups so learners can appreciate the many complexities of serious illness and learn from one another. While the curriculum was designed for in-person learning experiences, it could easily be adapted to a virtual format if desired.

Target Audience

Physicians, social workers, chaplains, nurses, and other medical professionals who work with seriously ill patients or their families and are seeking to gain or enhance foundational palliative care knowledge and skills caring for these patients. No prior training in palliative care is required. The modules are designed to be delivered to small groups of 8-12 healthcare trainees or professionals, ideally from different professions.

Facilitator Requirements

The modules are designed to be taught by a pair of clinicians from different professions who are experts in palliative care and/or have significant clinical experience caring for patients with serious illness. All modules can be taught by any combination of disciplines (with the exception of Pain Management and Symptom Management that require one of the facilitators be either a physician or a nurse).

Module Details

The curriculum consists of nine 55-minute modules:

1. Introduction to Palliative Care
2. Psychosocial Care
3. Spiritual and Cultural Care
4. Serious Illness Communication (Part 1)
5. Serious Illness Communication (Part 2)
6. Pain Management
7. Symptom Management
8. Advance Care Planning
9. Care Near the End of Life

For each module, there is a Powerpoint slide deck (with detailed facilitator notes in the slide comments) and an accompanying facilitator guide that provides an overview of the module, lists necessary supplies for the session, and suggests resources for facilitator preparation. The modules are designed to elicit group participation and interprofessional discussion. Each session includes group activities, case discussion and self-reflection. Modules can be completed individually or as a series. They can be easily adapted for clinicians of various roles, training, specialties, and experience levels, including single profession and mixed interprofessional groups.

Other Resources

Three Qualtrics electronic surveys are available for your use:

1. Learner Group Intake Survey: This survey can be helpful when working with a learner group to design a course. The survey gathers information on learner group demographics, scheduling requirements, and interests.
2. Pre-Post Module Survey: The pre-survey for each module asks learners to report their confidence in their knowledge/ability to perform each of the module's objectives. The post-survey again asks learners to rate their confidence and also allows an opportunity for learners to provide specific feedback on the module(s).
3. Final Evaluation Survey: This survey can be given after a learner group completes the full nine-hour curriculum. It asks learners to report the curriculum's overall quality and applicability, collected a Net Promoter Score (NPS) to determine how likely participants were to recommend the course to a colleague, and asked for global course comments.

Primary Palliative Care Education Learning Objectives by Module

Module 1: Introduction to Palliative Care

Define primary versus specialty palliative care.
Describe common serious illness trajectories.
Differentiate between patients that would benefit from palliative care and those who would benefit from hospice.

Module 2: Psychosocial Care

Appreciate how the psychological and social aspects of patients' lives influence their experience of serious illness.
Learn simple screening methods to identify psychosocial needs.
Understand how to provide basic support and other resources to address these needs.

Module 3: Spiritual and Culture Care

Appreciate the importance of the cultural and spiritual domains of palliative care.
Become familiar with screening patients to identify cultural and spiritual needs and strengths.
Understand how to provide basic support and other resources to address need.

Module 4: Serious Illness Communication (Part I)

Describe four skills to enhance your communication with seriously ill patients and families.
List best practices when communicating with seriously ill patients and families.

Module 5: Serious Illness Communication (Part 2)

Describe how capacities impact your communication with seriously ill patients
Demonstrate four skills to enhance your communication with seriously ill patients

Module 6: Pain Management

Discuss how a patient's biologic/psychosocial/spiritual/cultural identity informs their experience of pain
Identify helpful pain assessment tools
Describe a multi-modal approach to managing pain

Module 7: Symptom Management

Appreciate the frequency with which seriously ill patients experience symptoms
Demonstrate a holistic approach to symptom management
Identify key assessment and management strategies for three of the most common symptoms

Module 8: Advance Care Planning

Describe the process of ACP
List tools available to assist patients and families in documenting care preferences
Identify communication strategies to introduce and explore a patient's care preferences

Module 9: Care Near the End of Life

Describe what patients/families want at the end of life
Identify common signs and symptoms in final days of life
Recognize religious/spiritual/cultural practices and rituals before/after death
Name strategies to identify and address grief and bereavement needs
Recognize approaches to identifying professional grief