

Palliative Care Physicians and Palliative Radiotherapy, Knowledge and Barriers for Referring: A Cross-sectional Study

Por: [Vargas, A](#) (Vargas, Andres)¹; [Torres, C](#) (Torres, Carolina)²; [Kuller-Bosch, A](#) (Kuller-Bosch, Anna)³; [Villena, B](#) (Villena, Belen)⁴

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Abstract

Context. Palliative radiotherapy is effective in the management of symptoms resulting from advanced cancer. However, it remains underutilized. In developed countries, many factors have been linked to this phenomenon but data in developing and low-income countries, particularly in Latin America, are lacking.

Objectives. To conduct a cross-sectional survey to explore palliative care physicians' knowledge of palliative radiotherapy and to investigate possible factors that limit patient referral.

Methods. This is a cross-sectional survey. An online questionnaire was sent to palliative care physicians (n = 170) registered in the Chilean Medical Society of Palliative Care directory.

Results. The overall response rate was 58.8%. Nearly all respondents (98%) considered radiotherapy to be a useful treatment. Less than half the respondents (43%) had good knowledge of palliative radiotherapy. Knowledge was correlated with self-reported knowledge (P = 0.015), discussing cases with radiation oncologist (P = 0.001), and having attended educational events on palliative radiotherapy (P = 0.001). Patient reluctance, poor performance status, and family reluctance were identified as major barriers to the use of palliative radiotherapy. Physicians from cities other than the capital were more likely to be concerned about barriers such as distance to radiotherapy facilities (P = 0.01), the duration of the referral process (P = 0.01), and the lack of a radiation oncologist available for discussing cases (P = 0.01).

Conclusions. Several barriers affect referral to palliative radiotherapy. Some barriers seem to be more significant for physicians practicing in cities far from cancer centers. Physicians' knowledge is less than

optimal and has been identified as a barrier to referral. Educational interventions and broadening the availability of cancer treatment resources are needed to improve the referral process. (C) 2020 American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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Información del autor

Dirección para petición de copias:

Ave Amer Vespucio Norte 1314, Santiago 7630370, Chile.

Dirección correspondiente: Vargas, A (autor correspondiente)

Ave Amer Vespucio Norte 1314, Santiago 7630370, Chile.

Direcciones:

[1] Inst Radiomed IRAM, Dept Radiat Oncol, Santiago, Chile

[2] Hosp San Jose Osorno, Palliat Care Unit, Osorno, Chile

+ [3] Hosp Barros Luco, Palliat Care Unit, Santiago, Chile

+ [4] Pontificia Univ Catolica Valparaiso, Inst Literatura & Ciencias Lenguaje, Valparaiso, Chile

Direcciones de correo electrónico:andres.vargas@iram.cl

Editorial

ELSEVIER SCIENCE INC, STE 800, 230 PARK AVE, NEW YORK, NY 10169 USA

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