

News release

Providing palliative care makes economic sense

Feb. 15 – Providing palliative care services across Canada would result in better care for less money.

That's the conclusion of a new analysis just released by the Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians (CSPCP). The report is based on recently published studies assessing the economics of providing palliative care versus usual care.

"Investing in palliative care and hospice services would not only provide the type of care many people require and currently lack, it also makes sound economic sense," said CSPCP President Dr. David Henderson, from Truro, NS.

"Providing palliative care would enable the more efficient and appropriate use of Canadian health care resources, today and in the future, by reducing the costs of caring for people with life-threatening chronic illnesses and freeing up much-needed hospital beds."

The report: "[Palliative Care: A vital service with clear economic, health and social benefits](#)" makes a solid case for the effectiveness of palliative care and hospice programs, from both a cost and patient care perspective.

Canada is an aging country, with nearly one in six people at least 65 years old as of July 1, 2015, according to Statistics Canada. This translates into higher costs for Canada's health care system, particularly as Canadian seniors advance to the latter years of life.

The report notes that while good aggregate cost data does not exist in Canada, extrapolating research from other countries to the Canadian context suggests a quarter of total health care costs are spent in the last year of life.

"There is no reason to expect this would be different in Canada," said Dr. Henderson.

Data presented in the report from different studies of in-hospital palliative care show:

- Compared to usual acute care, hospital-based palliative care saves approximately \$7,000 to \$8,000 per patient
- Cost savings are 1.5 times greater than the cost of palliative care when consultation was provided within two days of admission to hospital.

Johns Hopkins Health System in Baltimore evaluated the financial impact of expanding a six-bed palliative care unit to 11 beds and expanding the in-hospital palliative care consultation service. The conclusion? It would save more than US\$19 million over the next five years.

Randomized controlled trials have shown outpatient palliative care services result in direct health care cost savings of about 30% compared to regular care.

Availability of these services also:

- improves patient satisfaction with care,
- improves symptom control and quality of life,
- reduces health care utilization, and
- may lengthen survival

Home-based palliative care has also been shown to be cost-effective and reduce the use of other, more expensive health services.

A 2013 study projected that expanding in-home palliative team care to those in Ontario currently not receiving such services (approximately 45,000 people per year, at an annual cost of \$76 million to \$108 million) is likely to improve quality of life, reduce the use of acute care resources, and avoid \$191 million to \$385 million in health care costs.

The report notes that shifting patients' care from acute care settings to residential hospices for patients unable to be cared for at home results in an estimated savings of approximately \$600 a day.

"Each of these types of palliative care or hospice programs provides the opportunity to deliver better care for less money while improving the quality of life and care for patients and their families," said Dr. Henderson. "The ideal approach to improving palliative care in Canada should include a mix of all these programs and we should act now."

The Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians has developed recommendations for the federal, provincial and territorial governments on how to improve, monitor and evaluate quality and access to palliative care services across Canada.

"It's time," said Dr. Henderson, "to apply what we have already learned and evaluate the benefits for Canadians."

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About the Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians

The Vision of the Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians is to promote access to palliative care for all Canadians, through advocacy, partnerships, research, and physician education. Our membership consists of approximately 500 palliative care physicians, including regional and local program leaders, educators, residency directors, clinicians, and palliative care residents.