

Perceived quality of end-of-life communication provided by healthcare professionals among frail older Chinese patients

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Abstract

Introduction

Better communications among the patient, their family, and healthcare providers can enable a shared understanding on patient's end-of-life (EOL) care preferences. Discussion about death-related issue however has been thought to be taboo among Chinese people. This study aims to explore perceived quality of EOL communication provided by healthcare professionals (HCPs) among frail older Chinese patients.

Method: Frail older patients were recruited from a medical ward of a public hospital for a randomized controlled trial of the effectiveness of a nurse-led advance care planning. Participants completed a baseline questionnaire including the 7-item Quality of Communication (QOC) Questionnaire which measures perceived quality of EOL communication provided by HCPs (0 'The worst or none happened' to 10 'The best'). Bivariate analyses examined associated factors of QOC.

Results: Between December 2018 and January 2020, 105 participants were recruited and have completed the QOC. Their mean age was 80 years old (SD=7.1), and 74% (n=78) reported had received some formal education. A total of 95 participants (91%) responded '0' to all the 7 items in QOC (poor QOC group). For individual QOC item, all participants scored '0' in 4 items, 99 scored '0' in Item 1 "Talking about details if you got sicker", 104 scored '0' in Item 2 "Talking about how long you might have to live", and 101 scored '0' in Item 7 "Respecting your spiritual

or religious beliefs”. Participants with ‘0’ score in QOC reported a significant lower mean level in certainty regarding decision-making in EOL preferences (1.2 ± 1.6 vs. 2.3 ± 1.8 , $p=0.039$).

Conclusion: Occurrence of talking about EOL care with frail older Chinese patients by HCPs was rare, and the quality of EOL communication associated with decision-making certainty regarding EOL preferences. Training of initiation of EOL discussions and improve communication skills for HCPs is essential.

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