END OF LIFE CARE COMMUNICATION SKILLS TRAINING FOR GENERALIST PALLIATIVE CARE PROVIDERS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Background: Staff delivering end of life care (EoLC) require training in communication skills. This is often delivered via courses led by palliative care specialists. Despite the widespread availability of such courses, there is no comprehensive review of training interventions and the methodologies used in their evaluation. Such a review is needed to inform the development of robust evaluation strategies to ensure that training and clinical practice are evidence based.

Aim: To identify and appraise the effectiveness of EoLC communication skills training interventions that are delivered to non-specialist staff.

Methods: A systematic review of the literature up to November 2014 was conducted using searches of 10 electronic databases. Inclusion criteria were: report of an evaluation of a communication skills training intervention in non-specialist providers of EoLC. Study assessments were conducted by two authors independently.

Results: 10296 unique records were identified; 153 were eligible for inclusion. Most (n=79) originated from the USA, followed by the UK (n=27). The majority (n=105) of studies had no control group, and less than 20% of studies randomised participants to intervention groups. Over 70% (n=112) of studies relied on trainee self-report measures to test training effectiveness. Only four studies used clinical outcome measures. Overall quality of studies in terms of reporting, internal validity and external validity was variable.

Conclusion: The variability in evaluation methodologies relating to interventions designed to improve EoLC communication skills indicates a need for more research in this area. Evidence from this review will inform the design and evaluation of EoLC communication skills training.

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