Hospitalization or Home Care at the End of Life. The Experience in a Greek Home Palliative Care Service

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Introduction: 'Galilee' palliative care service has been providing home care for adult cancer patients, in a large suburban area of Athens since 2010. The study was funded by FP 8.

The **aim** of the study is to explore factors associated with the cancer patients' place of death.

Methods: The sample consisted of 237 cancer patients receiving home palliative care from an interdisciplinary team from March 2010 to July 2013. Retrospective data collection included: demographic and clinical characteristics, patients' ESAS-r (Edmond Symptom Assessment System Revised) evaluation of symptoms (Likert type 0-10 scale) at the time of referral to the service, 1 (T1) and 2 (T2) months later. SPSS 17.0 was used for statistical analysis.

Patients' Demographics & Care Data

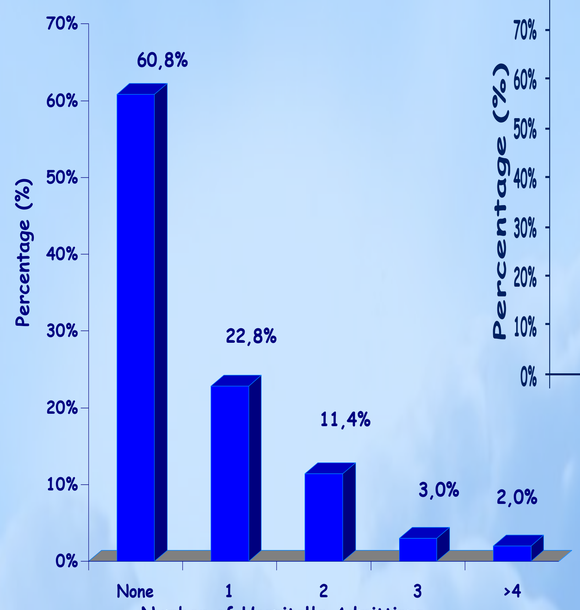
	Frequency (N=237)	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Female	122	51.5
Male	115	48.5
Age (mean ± SD) (range) (years)	67,3±12,4 (28-93)	
ECOG (mean ± SD)	2.8±1.2	
ECOG 3-4	142	59.9
ECOG 2	38	16.0
ECOG 0-1	43	18.2
Length of Palliative Home Care (median) (range) (days)	58 (1-1145)	
Number of home visits (median) (range)	13.5 (1-240)	
Patients' Primary Caregiver		
Husband/ Wife	94	39.7
Child	51	21.5
Other Family member	38	16.0
No Caregiver	14	5.9
Mother	9	3.8
Friends	5	2.1
Social Network	4	1.7
Other	22	9.3

SD Standard Deviation

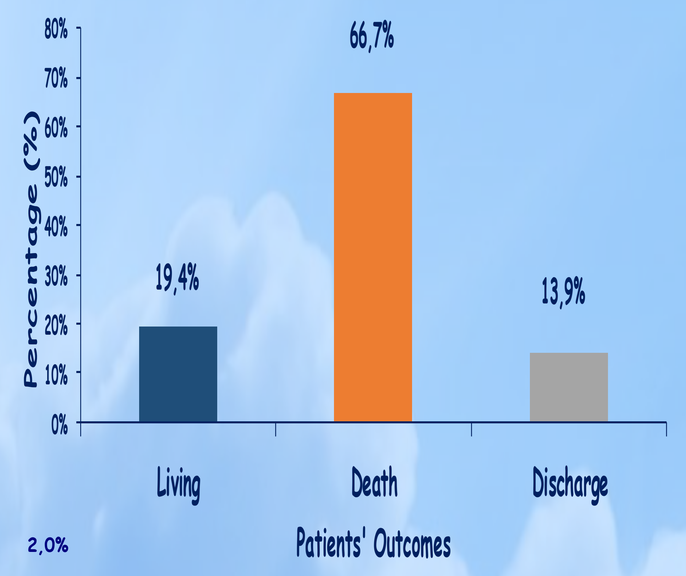
Disease Characteristics

Cancer Diagnosis	Frequency (N=237)	Percentage (%)
Lung	47	19.8
Gastrointestinal	45	19.0
Breast	43	18.1
Urinary	33	13.9
Genital	23	9.7
Head-Neck	9	3.8
Skin	7	3.0
Brain	7	3.0
Multiple Myeloma	4	1.7
Unknown Primary	3	1.3
Sarcoma	3	1,3
Hematologic	3	1.3
Other	10	4.2
Antineoplasmatic Treatment		
No Antineoplasmatic Treatment	119	50.2
Chemotherapy	51	21.5
Chemotherapy – Radiotherapy	21	8.9
Radiotherapy	20	8.4
Surgery	12	5.1
Hormone Therapy	4	1.7
Other	10	4.2

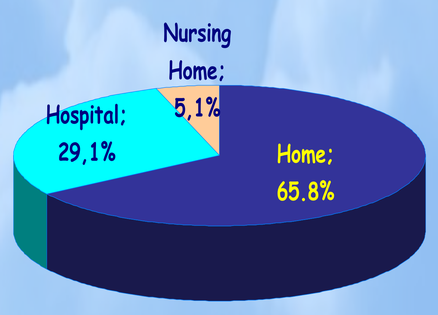
Patients' Hospital Admissions During Home Palliative Care



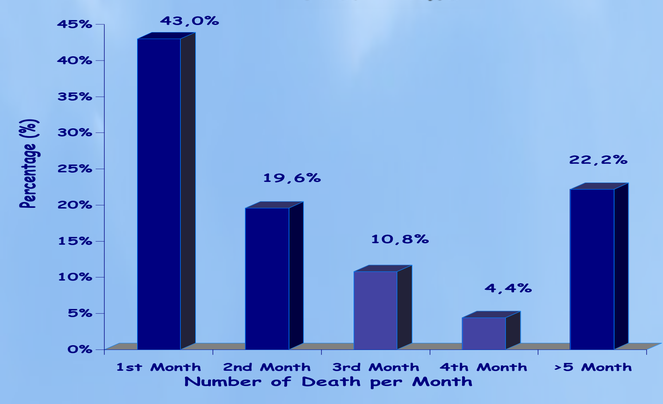
Patients' Outcomes



Patients' Place of Death



Patients' Death Distribution over Time



Reason of Last Admission to the Hospital Before Death

Reason of Hospital Admission	Frequency (N=66)	Percentage (%)
Health Deterioration	17	25.8
Shorten of Breath	12	18.2
Infection/ Fever	10	15.2
Hemorrhage	3	4.5
Tiredness	3	4.5
Diarrhea	3	4.5
Nausea/ Vomiting	3	4.5
Cardiovascular disorder	2	3.0
Anemia	2	3.0
Pain	2	3.0
Other	9	13.8

Associations of Patients' Demographic & Clinical Characteristics with the Place of Death

Older patients ($x^2(2)=9.67$, $p=0.008$) and those with a child or other family member as primary caregiver ($x^2(12)=33.4$, $p=0.001$) died at home. On the other hand patients that died in the hospital had more hospital admissions ($x^2(12)=33.4$, $p=0.001$). This proved to be true, regardless of the reasons of hospitalization ($p=0.496$).

Associations of Patients' Responses of Symptoms With Place of Death

	Admission to Service		1st Month	
Symptom	x^2(df)	p	x^2(df)	p
Pain	4.6(2)	.100	4.2(2)	.124
Tiredness	3.5(2)	.173	1.7(2)	.424
Drowsiness	2.7(2)	.263	,6(2)	,732
Nausea	.3(2)	.863	,5(2)	,765
Lack of Appetite	2.9(2)	.233	.2(2)	.893
Shorten of Breath	2.2(2)	.338	1.7(2)	.422
Depression	1.5(2)	.474	3.9(2)	.136
Anxiety	3.5(2)	.171	4.7(2)	.097
Well Being	3.6(2)	.165	1.6(2)	.447
Constipation	1.7(2)	.431	2.5(2)	0.284

Conclusions: Study results highlight that regardless of late referral, a great number of patients were supported to die at home. Further research is needed to clarify reasons of hospitalization at the end of life.

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