

Paediatric Palliative Care: Challenges and Opportunities for Nurses: A Literature Review

Fatimah Khalid Alonazi, Ranyah Mohammed Almass, Intisar Ayed Alkhaldi

King Saud Medical City, Saudi Arabia

Correspondence:

Fatimah Khalid Alonazi

King Saud Medical City

Email: fatimahalonazi129@gmail.com

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Abstract

Background: Paediatric palliative care is a specialized approach designed to improve the quality of life for children facing life-limiting illnesses, and their families. This comprehensive review explores the various interventions implemented within the realm of paediatric palliative care, encompassing physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions.

Methods: A systematic literature search was conducted across major medical databases, identifying studies, reviews, and guidelines related to paediatric palliative care interventions. The selected articles were critically appraised to extract information on diverse aspects of care, including symptom management, psychosocial support, family-centred approaches, and ethical considerations.

Results: The review synthesizes evidence on the holistic nature of paediatric palliative care, highlighting the effectiveness of multidisciplinary teams in addressing the complex needs of children and their families. Physical symptom management, encompassing pain control and other symptom alleviation strategies, emerged as a crucial component. Psychosocial support interventions, including counselling and therapeutic approaches, were found to enhance emotional well-being for both children and their caregivers.

Discussion: Effective communication emerged as a fundamental aspect, fostering shared decision-making and open dialogue about the child's illness, prognosis, and treatment options. The family-centred approach recognized the pivotal role of families in the care continuum, emphasizing their needs and preferences. Ethical considerations surrounding end-of-life care were explored, emphasizing the importance of navigating complex decision-making processes with sensitivity and respect for cultural and religious beliefs.

Conclusion: Paediatric palliative care, as revealed through this comprehensive review, constitutes a multifaceted and evolving field. The integration of diverse interventions, coupled with ongoing research and advancements, underscores the commitment to enhancing the quality of life for children facing life-limiting illnesses and their families. Future directions include continued collaboration between healthcare professionals, increased awareness, and further research to optimize care practices and outcomes in paediatric palliative care.

Keywords: paediatric palliative care, multidisciplinary care, symptom management, psychosocial support, family-centred care, ethical considerations

Literature Review: Paediatric Palliative Care

Paediatric palliative care is a specialized and evolving field dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for children facing life-limiting illnesses and their families. This literature review explores key themes in paediatric palliative care, including holistic care approaches, symptom management, family-centred care, and ethical considerations.

Holistic Care in Paediatric Palliative Care

Holistic care is a fundamental principle in paediatric palliative care, aiming to address the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of the child and their family (Davies et al., 2017; Himelstein et al., 2016). The integration of a multidisciplinary team is crucial, involving healthcare professionals such as physicians, nurses, social workers, psychologists, and chaplains (Feudtner et al., 2013; Wolfe et al., 2018).

Symptom Management

Effective symptom management is paramount in improving the child's comfort and overall well-being (Collins et al., 2015; Klick et al., 2019). Studies highlight advancements in pain control, nausea management, and innovative approaches to alleviate symptoms (Twycross et al., 2017; von Baeyer et al., 2018).

Family-Centred Approaches

Recognizing the family as a unit of care is a cornerstone of paediatric palliative care (Liben et al., 2015). Family-centred care interventions involve families in decision-making, care planning, and emotional support, promoting resilience within the family unit (Widger et al., 2016; Bluebond-Langner et al., 2018).

Communication in Paediatric Palliative Care

Effective communication is crucial for facilitating shared decision-making and providing support to families (Knapp et al., 2017; Wiener et al., 2015). Communication tools and training for healthcare professionals are essential components of paediatric palliative care interventions (Feraco et al., 2019; Kassam et al., 2016).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations, particularly in end-of-life care, are explored in the literature (Lyon et al., 2014; Meert et al., 2018). Discussions on the withholding or withdrawing of treatment, respecting the autonomy of the child, and providing bereavement support are crucial aspects of ethical paediatric palliative care (Sisk et al., 2020; Hain et al., 2016).

This literature review highlights the multidimensional nature of paediatric palliative care interventions, emphasizing holistic and family-centred approaches. Ongoing research, collaboration, and advancements in symptom management and communication strategies contribute to the evolving landscape of paediatric palliative care, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for children and their families.

Methods

The literature review method was conducted in this research. Numerous articles were defined through searches of four electronic databases: CINAHL, Google Scholar, PubMed, and Web of Science. Key words during the search process included paediatric palliative care, multidisciplinary care, symptom management, psychosocial support, family-centred care, ethical considerations.

The literature search revealed 1500 topics for initial investigating. After reviewing the topics for their overall topics related to our research and discarding unrelated topics and repeated titles, 36 topics remained for literature review. Furthermore, 18 studies were excluded from research because they did not align with the inclusion criteria in our research or to the exclusion criteria.

Discussion

Holistic Approaches in Paediatric Palliative Care

Paediatric palliative care embodies a holistic approach, addressing the multifaceted needs of children facing life-limiting illnesses. Davies et al. (2017) emphasize the importance of holistic care, including physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. This approach recognizes the child as a whole being, necessitating a coordinated effort from a multidisciplinary team to optimize the child's quality of life (Wolfe et al., 2018).

Symptom Management Strategies

Efficient symptom management is paramount in paediatric palliative care to alleviate suffering and enhance the overall well-being of the child. Twycross et al. (2017) discuss advancements in pain control, emphasizing the use of tailored approaches to address individual needs. Collins et al. (2015) highlight the significance of comprehensive symptom management, extending beyond pain to encompass nausea, fatigue, and other symptoms.

Family-Centred Care

Family-centred care plays a pivotal role in pediatric palliative care, recognizing the interdependence between the child and their family. Liben et al. (2015) advocate for interventions that involve families in decision-making and care planning. The positive impact of family-centred approaches is evident in studies by Bluebond-Langner et al. (2018), emphasizing the importance of addressing not only the medical needs of the child but also the emotional and practical needs of the entire family unit.

Effective Communication Strategies

Open and effective communication is a linchpin in navigating the complexities of paediatric palliative care. Wiener et al. (2015) stress the importance of transparent communication about the child's condition, prognosis, and treatment options. Feraco et al. (2019) contribute to this discourse by highlighting the value of communication skills training for healthcare professionals, underscoring the need for tailored approaches in discussing sensitive topics with families.

Ethical Considerations in Paediatric Palliative Care

Navigating ethical considerations is an inherent part of paediatric palliative care, especially in end-of-life situations. Lyon et al. (2014) discuss the nuances of ethical decision-making, including the withholding or withdrawing of treatment. Meert et al. (2018) delve into the ethical aspects of bereavement support, emphasizing the need for compassionate and culturally sensitive care during the grieving process.

Emerging Trends and Innovations

The landscape of paediatric palliative care is continually evolving with emerging trends and innovations. Himmelstein et al. (2016) explore the role of technology in enhancing care, while Knapp et al. (2017) discuss creative modalities such as play therapy and art therapy. These innovations contribute to a more personalized and comprehensive approach to address the unique needs of each child and family.

In conclusion, paediatric palliative care represents a comprehensive and evolving field that seeks to enhance the quality of life for children facing life-limiting illnesses, and their families. Holistic care, effective symptom management, family-centred approaches, communication strategies, and ethical considerations form the core pillars of this specialized care. Ongoing research and innovative interventions further propel the field forward, emphasizing a collective commitment to optimizing the well-being of children in palliative care.

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