

Challenges and opportunities in providing hospice care in assisted living facilities

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Introduction

As the population of elderly adults in the United States continues to increase as well as the number of patients living with chronic disease, there will be an increased need for long-term care services, including hospice care in assisted living facilities. The aim of this study was to identify challenges in this area, with a specific focus on attitudes about, and experiences in, hospice care in assisted living facilities.

Methods

We conducted surveys and individual interviews with staff members in hospice care and assisted-living facilities (ALF) in the state of Georgia, USA. We administered a 19-question survey with five-point Likert scales and one multiple choice question to staff members from June 2017 to August 2017. Individual interviews were conducted with a subset of survey respondents so they could expound on personal experiences. Survey responses were aggregated to identify the number of respondents reporting challenges in areas such as medication management. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed to determine patterns in the challenges and proposed solutions reported by respondents.

Results

This study was conducted at 9 facilities: 4 hospice care facilities and 5 ALFs. A total of 77 individuals were surveyed (36 ALF staff and 41 hospice care staff). Of these, 10 individuals were also interviewed (7 ALF staff and 3 hospice care staff). In the survey, 74% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that hospice care and ALFs work well together (Figure 1). Interview and survey results revealed the need for effective communication between hospice and ALFs to ensure the best patient outcomes. The primary areas of concern for both hospice care and ALF staff regarding specific challenges in medication management were pain management, communication on medication orders, and narcotics (Figure 2). Interview participants also stressed the importance of the development of trust and good relationships between staff members of ALFs and hospice-care facilities to provide the best patient care.

Conclusion

While hospice care and ALF staff perceive hospice and ALFs as currently functioning well together, many challenges remain to improve the provision of hospice care in ALFs. This study identified particular challenges in medication management, communication, and relationships between hospice care and ALFs. Although the study was limited by a small sample size, the results highlight the need for new emphasis on intra- and inter-facility relationships and enhanced communication. To help achieve this goal, the results of this study will be distributed to hospice-care facilities and ALFs in order to educate all staff members regarding the challenges faced by their peers, and the solutions being discussed and developed, to ensure progress in the future.

Figure 1
Overall, Hospice and Assisted Living Facilities Work Well Together

Respondents were asked to provide their opinion on the above statement

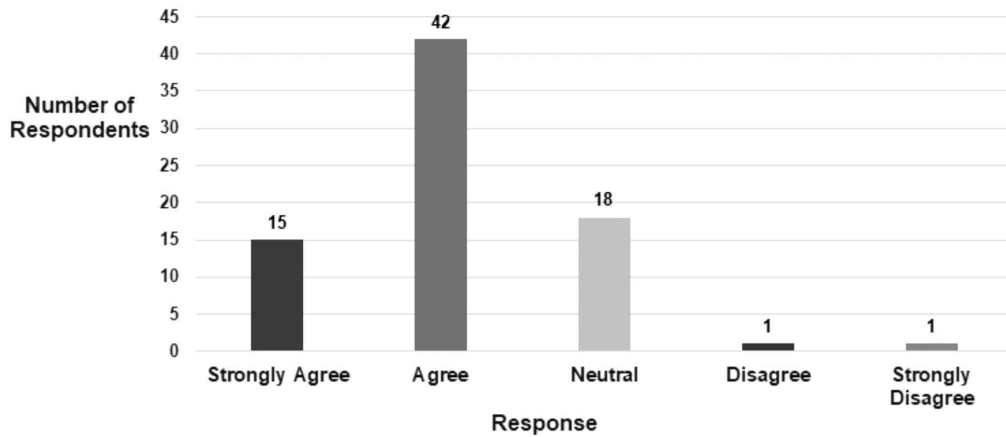


Figure 2
Challenges in Medication Management

Respondents were asked to choose their top three challenges regarding medication management

