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Teaching palliative care in nursing at Poznan University of Medical Sciences— from theory to practice.

Graduates of a master's course in nursing obtain the knowledge and skills which should prepare them for carrying out their nursing tasks, also single-handedly. One of the important tasks of the nursing staff is to look after the elderly and other patients towards the end of their lives. The aim of palliative care, according to a definition by WHO, is to improve the quality of life for patients and their families who have to face problems connected with life-threatening illnesses. All measures are taken with a view to relieving pain and solving mental, social and spiritual problems. Hence, it is advisable to teach a wide range of competences in the palliative care aspect of the nursing education.

The Poznan University of Medical Sciences, in its effort to prepare the nursing staff for professional patient care, devotes one module of the curriculum to palliative care. A substantial part of the module takes the form of clinical classes at the Palium Hospice, which is also an academic unit of the Poznan University of Medical Sciences. The concept of holistic patient care has also been included in the curriculum. Strictly medical issues include medical and nursing treatment of symptoms accompanying chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgical treatment. Much importance is given to pain treatment methods and selection of adequate cancer pain treatment, because later on it is the nurses who usually provide palliative care to patients, for example in patients' houses. The second area of training focuses on psychological and social issues. Nurses-to-be obtain knowledge necessary to identify psychological needs of elderly and terminally ill patients as well as their families, since diagnosing the condition of a patient and his/her surroundings is a starting point for planning the nursing intervention. As far as terminally ill people are concerned, other key issues included in the Poznan university's curriculum are communication with patients and their families and psychosocial support.

Interviews with the nurses who completed university courses show that some competences of palliative care are not trained well enough, even though the teaching content itself is considered very good. It should be stressed that although palliative care in Poland is provided mainly by hospices, palliative treatment is also an element of basic health care and, as such, can be given by nurses employed in basic healthcare clinics. This is why more attention should be paid to palliative care issues in the nursing curricula of graduate and postgraduate courses.