

An Interprofessional, Blended Learning Module on Palliative Care for Physician Assistant and Nurse Practitioner Students

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Introduction

Palliative care:

- An important component of addressing health care needs
- Is often overlooked
- Provides relief from pain and other symptoms
- Supports quality of life
- Focuses on patients with serious advanced illness and their families¹

Accreditation standard B2.06 requires PA curricula to include:

- Instruction in medical care across the life span
- Instruction in palliative and end-of-life care (EOLC)²

PA programs generally provide little formal instruction in palliative care.³

Purpose and objectives

Develop and implement an interprofessional learning module on palliative care and EOLC to enhance PA and NP students':

- Skills in communicating with patients regarding EOLC
- Comfort in discussing EOL decisions & care
- Knowledge of the importance of palliative care in improving quality of care at the EOL.

Analysis

- Pre-module Likert-scale survey on knowledge, skills, and attitudes
- Post-module reflective essays to assess knowledge, attitude change, and confidence with EOLC communication
- Qualitative analysis by a faculty member who read the reflective essays completed at the end of the module to identify emerging themes

Materials and Methods

Pre-class:

• Selected readings

- *Dying in America: Improving quality and honoring individual preferences near the end of life*. The National Academies Press, 2014
- Oncotalk Learning Module 1: *Fundamental Communication Skills*, Medical Oncology Communication Skills Training, 2002, University of Washington

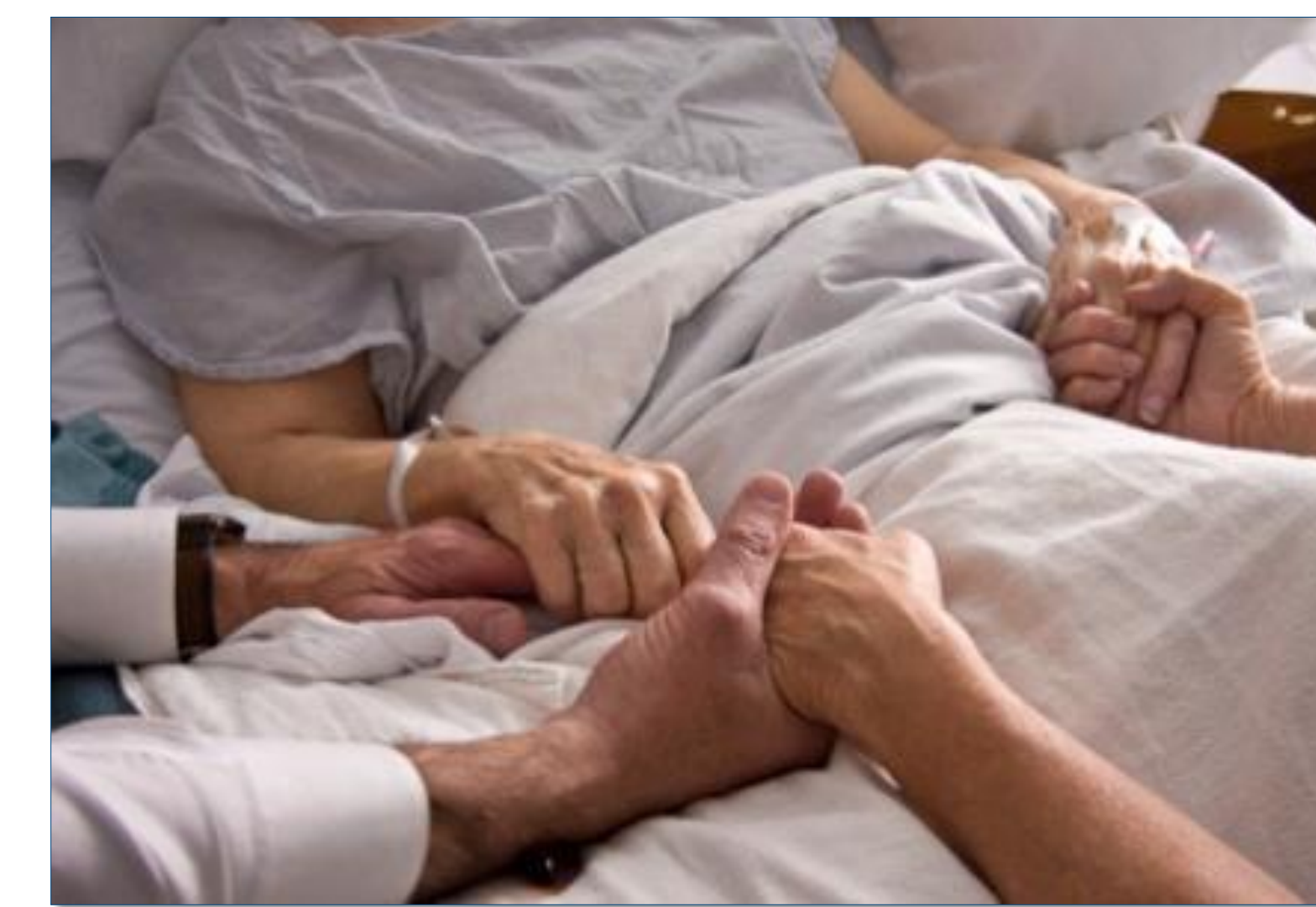
• Three video presentations by the Center for Education in Palliative and End-of-life Care (EPEC), Northwestern University

- Communicating Difficult News
- Whole Patient Assessment
- Pain Assessment and Management

In-class:

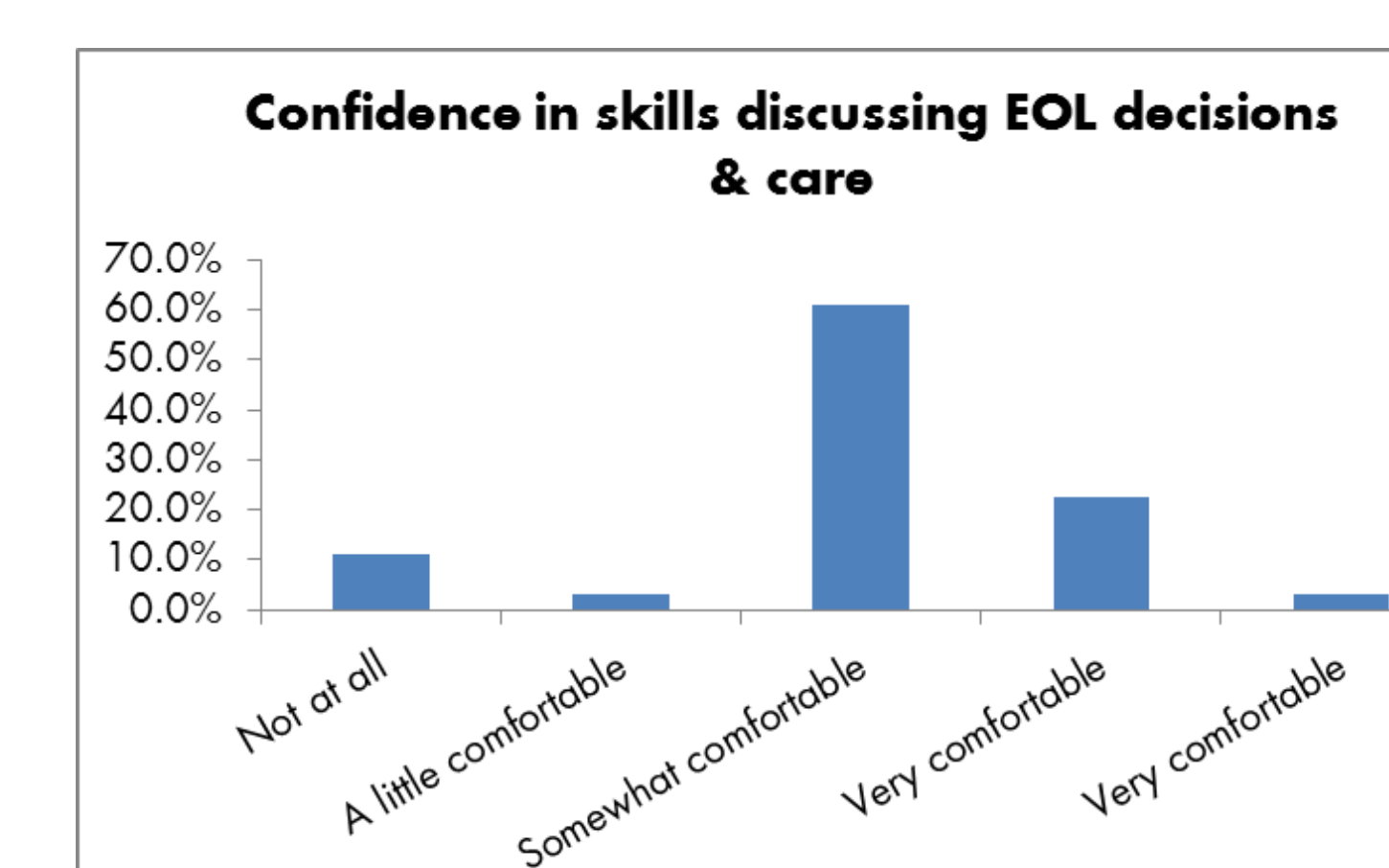
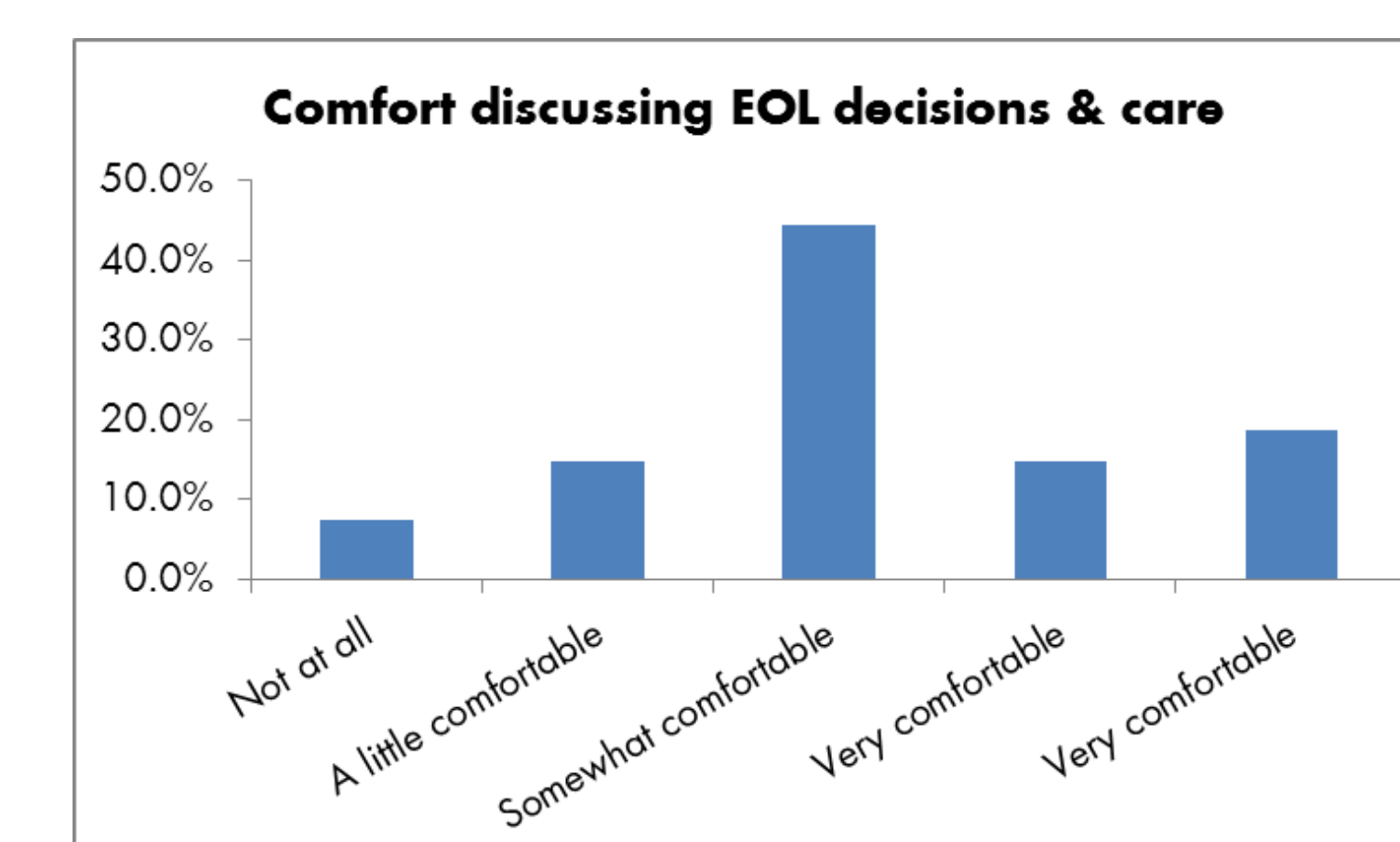
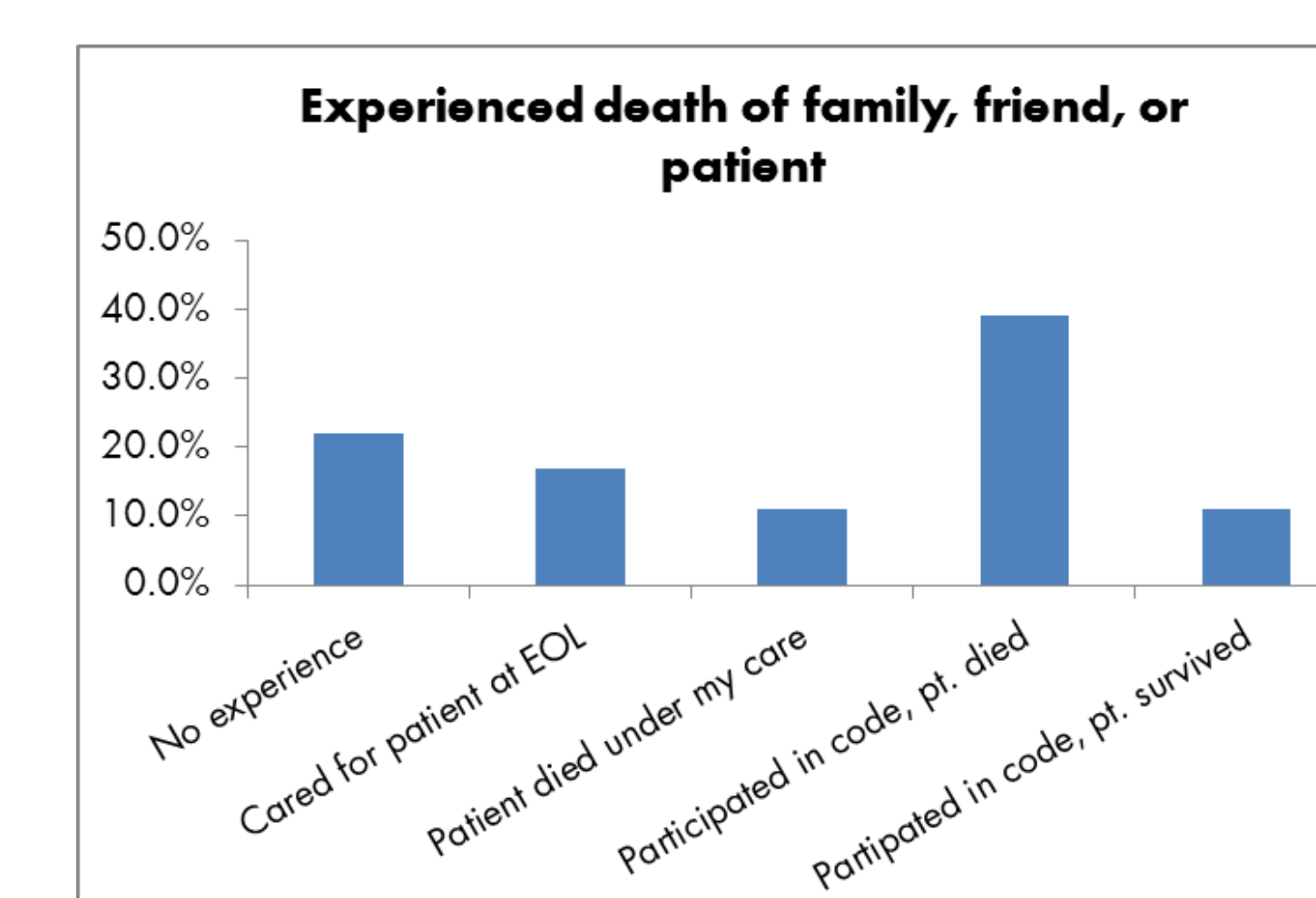
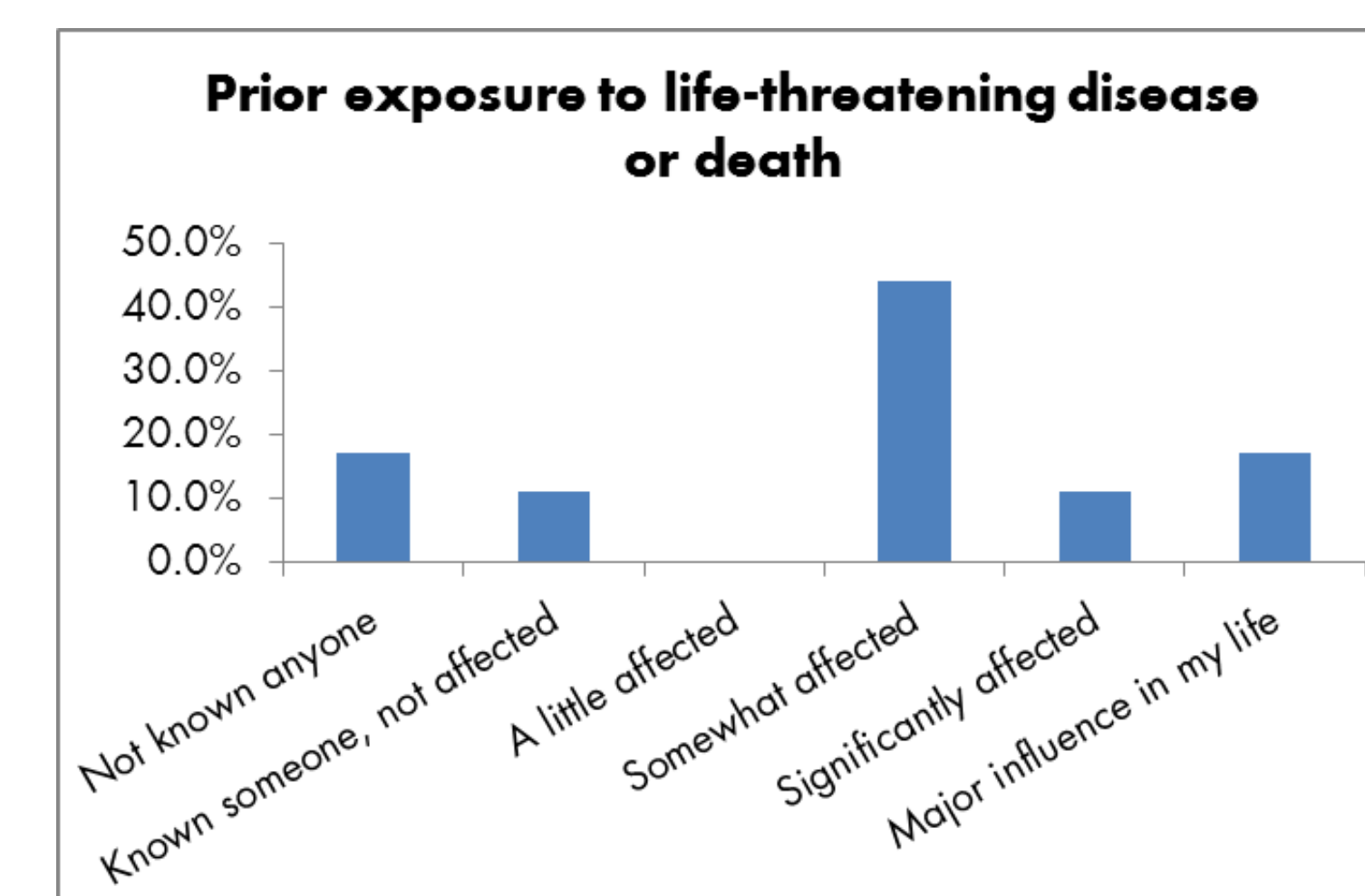
• Interprofessional class discussion and reflections

- between PA and NP students
- Impact of unwanted, uncoordinated treatment



Results

Pre-instructional survey with questions on the following subjects



Emerging Themes

By the end of the module students:

- Recognized the importance of
 - Empathic communication with patients and families
 - Timely and effective communication on EOLC with patients and families
 - The effectiveness of the communication skills demonstrated in the Oncotalk Learning Module
- Developed increased confidence in the ability to have difficult conversations with patients facing life-threatening illness
- Recognized that confidence and comfort in having difficult conversations comes with experience and practice

Summary & Conclusions

- EOLC is a limited focus of PA education
- The majority (26/29) of the class reported the module increased their comfort level and confidence in discussion of EOLC
- This interprofessional module was successfully implemented in the existing curriculum without increased program cost or length

Recommendations

- The need for palliative care provided by PAs is expected to grow as the US population ages
- PA curricula can incorporate palliative care competencies using a blended approach
- This module will be replicated with future cohorts including learners from other health professions

References

1. IOM (Institute of Medicine). *Dying in America: Improving Quality and Honoring Individual Preferences Near the End of Life* (2014). National Academies Press.
2. ARC-PA *Accreditation Manual for Standards*, 4th edition, April, 2015.
3. Lanning LC, Dadig BA. A strategy for incorporating palliative care and end-of-life instruction into physician assistant education. *JPAE*. 2010; 21:41-46.

Acknowledgments

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