

Patients call for health professionals to discuss care needs in life-threatening illnesses

7 September 2014

Patients with COPD would like healthcare professionals to discuss palliative care needs in more detail, according to a new study.

Palliative care refers to care that is focused on making a person comfortable and relieving symptoms, rather than treating a condition. It is often connected with [end-of-life care](#); although it can refer to any stage of care for any life-threatening condition.

The research, presented at the European Respiratory Society (ERS) International Congress in Munich today (7 September 2014), investigated the preferences of patients living with COPD.

A previous study by the same group identified the barriers that some healthcare [professionals](#) face in talking about palliative care. This research identified that one of the main reasons professionals avoid the conversation is because of a fear of destroying patients hopes for the future.

This study asked patients about this factor and assessed their perspective on discussions surrounding palliative care. Researchers conducted interviews with 12 patients who lived at home with COPD. The semi-structured interviews were then analysed descriptively.

The findings revealed that patients have many worries about the future of their condition but would like to discuss the disease and the management of their symptoms with healthcare professionals. The analysis of the interviews also showed that most patients felt uncomfortable bringing the topic of palliative care up with healthcare professionals and their families as they did not want to burden other people with their concerns.

The main outcome of the interview analysis was that patients felt that healthcare professionals should not be afraid to initiate conversations about [palliative care](#) as the patients themselves understood the condition was serious and required this type of conversation. They did not fear that discussions about this type of care could destroy their hopes for the future.

Camilla Mousing, lead author of the study from Aarhus University and VIA University College, said: "The findings of our research are very relevant for [healthcare professionals](#) working with patients with life-threatening illness. We have to overcome our fear of talking about this type of care and explain to patients that this does not mean we are giving up on them. Palliative care needs can be addressed from an early stage of an illness to ensure we are increasing the quality of everyday life for our patients. These needs can change on a daily basis for each patient and can be very different between [patients](#). We must be flexible in our approach and ensure we know who is responsible for assessing and taking action."

Provided by European Lung Foundation

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