

Celebrating 40 Years



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# Medical Students' Palliative Care Education in a Latin American University: A Three-Year Experience at Austral University in Buenos Aires, Argentina

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## Abstract

**Background:** The School of Medicine of Austral University incorporated palliative care as an elective in undergraduate medicine curriculum during 2010.

**Objective:** We analyzed the experience and results after 3 years of teaching palliative care. We compared students who chose palliative care as an elective subject (PC Group) with students who did not (Non-PC Group). We focused on the experience of contact with palliative care patients and self-perceived attitudes. Additionally, the impact produced by palliative care education in knowledge, self-perceived attitudes, and comfort was evaluated.

**Methods:** All the students tested completed a questionnaire on their attitude when exposed to dying patients. Students in the PC Group completed an additional questionnaire to assess their level of knowledge and their self-perceived comfort when interacting with patients.

**Results:** We tested 146 students. All students in the PC Group and 95.2% in the Non-PC Group considered that specific death issues ought to be part of the curriculum. Some students indicated that they could be present in a mandatory course. Before taking their elective, students in the PC Group confirmed a lack of technical training to understand palliative care patients, as did those students in the Non-PC Group. After taking a palliative care elective students expressed an improvement in self-perceived attitudes toward suffering and there was a significant increase ( $p < 0.0001 - 0.0045$ ) in

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**Discussion/Conclusion:** Our results show that palliative care education provides opportunities to improve attitudes not specific to this discipline: interprofessional collaboration, holistic care, patient-centered care, self-awareness, and humanism. We conclude that an exposure to palliative care improved student's perception about the complexities of dying patients and their care.

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