The care of dying people in nursing homes and intensive care units: a qualitative mixed-methods study

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Declared competing interests of authors: John E Ellershaw reports grants from Marie Curie Cancer Care and the Department of Health End of Life Care Programme outside the submitted work. In addition, Professor Ellershaw has a patent Liverpool Care Pathway logo which is a registered trademark within the UK and European Community issued to Marie Curie Cancer Care and the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust (joint holders). All Liverpool Care Pathway documentation is copyrighted as Marie Curie Palliative Care Institute Liverpool, a department of the University of Liverpool, Marie Curie Cancer Care and the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust, using standard Berne Convention. Professor Ellershaw is employed by the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust and has an honorary contract at the University of Liverpool.

Disclaimer: This report contains quotations from interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

Published June 2016
DOI: 10.3310/hsdr04200

Plain English summary

The care of dying people in nursing homes and intensive care units
Health Services and Delivery Research 2016; Vol. 4: No. 20
DOI: 10.3310/hsdr04200

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What did we do?

We aimed to explore the impact of the Liverpool Care Pathway for the Dying Patient (LCP) in nursing homes and intensive care units (ICUs) in the north-west of England and in London. The distinction in the use of the LCP between sites recruited for their LCP use and those recruited for their non-LCP use was not always upheld in practice: this limited our capacity for direct comparisons. Twenty-three sites (12 ICUs and 11 nursing homes) took part.

We reviewed organisation and patient records, undertook interviews with staff and bereaved relatives and observed the care being delivered to patients who were dying. We undertook 25 observations of care (17 ICUs and eight nursing homes) in 12 of these sites. In the nursing homes, we observed only LCP-supported deaths. In the ICUs, we observed both LCP-supported and non-LCP-supported deaths, but the small number made it difficult to make useful comparisons between the two.

What did we find?

Although the study could not assess the impact of the LCP, it did provide important information about the care of dying people. In both settings, end-of-life care was seen as the responsibility of nurses. Nurses believed that the LCP could support good care, but the LCP was not well understood by relatives. Observations in nursing homes showed a focus on physical care and the monitoring of the patient. Although generally welcomed by relatives, some of this care was questioned. Observations in ICUs showed careful consideration of the benefit of continued intervention, which was usually withdrawn only after a long period of monitoring and review. Staff made great efforts to involve relatives in discussions. Ongoing education and training would be of benefit in both settings.
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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its preceding programmes as project number 08/1813/256. The contractual start date was in January 2010. The final report began editorial review in December 2013 and was accepted for publication in May 2015. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors’ report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NCTCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NCTCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health.

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