



Undergraduate Medical Education on Pain Management, End-of-Life Care, and Palliative Care

*A position statement from the American Academy of Pain Medicine
Undergraduate Education Committee*

Pain is the most common reason patients seek medical care. While pain may be a symptom of an underlying disease or injury, it can also become a persistent symptom of an autonomous neuro-physiological process, in which situation it may constitute a unique neurobiological disorder. It has been demonstrated that all forms of pain, including acute, chronic, and that associated with terminal illness, are often poorly managed with consequent needless suffering. The American Academy of Pain Medicine, in its position statement on Chronic Pain and Quality Care at the End of Life, and the American Pain Society, in a similar statement, affirmed that effective pain and symptom management is an ethical obligation of all healthcare providers and organizations.

One of the main impediments to skillful end of life care is the lack of quality undergraduate education on pain management, end of life care, and palliative care. The Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME), the national accrediting authority for medical education programs leading to the M.D. degree in U.S. and Canadian medical schools, recently mandated education and clinical experience in end-of-life care in its standards for accreditation. This was an important step; however, of equal importance is education in the broader scope of pain medicine for medical professionals. While pain control is a significant component of end-of-life care, such care represents only a small fraction of the scope of knowledge and skills of pain medicine in which all medical students must be educated in order for the public to obtain skillful care for such problems as acute and chronic pain. Curriculum changes are necessary to ensure that future health care professionals are competent to provide expert pain diagnosis and treatment. The American Academy of Pain Medicine encourages its members to contribute to the education of future healthcare professionals in pain medicine, end-of-life care, and palliative care.

Recommendations:

AAPM recommends the following:

1. Pain medicine, end-of-life care, and palliative care should be required elements of the core medical school curriculum.
2. Integrated multidisciplinary courses are preferable to isolated lectures or clinical hours to optimize understanding and effectiveness in the provision of basic pain medicine, end-of-life care, and palliative care.
3. These courses should be planned and implemented by a designated faculty group with demonstrated training and experience in pain medicine, end-of-life care, and palliative care.

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