

Is It Possible Ho Integrate Palliative Care in Burn Intensive Care Units? Results from a Qualitative Study with Healthcare Professionals

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Background: Burn intensive care units (BurnICUs) are intensive care units specialized in the care of critically burned patients. Palliative Care (PC) is applicable in BurnICUs.

Aims: To understand healthcare professionals' perspectives about integrating PC in BurnICUs.

Methods: Qualitative study with in-depth interviews. All 5 reference centres of BurnICUs in Portugal were invited to participate; 3 participated. 15 professionals (12 nurses and 3 physicians) were interviewed from July to October 2020, until reaching theoretical saturation. A thematic analysis was performed to interview transcripts.

Results: Three themes emerged: Concept of PC; Potential impact of and Barriers and Facilitators. Professionals perceive PC either as end-of-life care or rehabilitation care. They consider that PC provides pain control and suffering relief, improving patients' quality of life (QoL). All participants agreed that PC could be integrated in BurnICUs but lack ideas on how to do it. Three barriers were identified: (i) patients' condition, characterized by high degrees of uncertainty, as serious burn injuries are associated to hemodynamic instability and highly technical procedures that may aggravate pain and suffering; (ii) characteristics of BurnICUs, which might compromise PC philosophy and practices, particularly due to restricted access and visiting policies because of the high risk of infection; and (iii) teamwork dynamics of BurnICUs, making collaboration between professionals working in BurnICUs and PC difficult. Some facilitators were highlighted, namely the outcomes of PC integration: improving patients' QoL and quality of care.

Conclusions: PC in BurnICUs is perceived either as end-of-life care or rehabilitation care. This shows the potential for integrating PC in BurnICUs. While professionals identify barriers for the integration of PC in this setting, they recognise facilitators and opportunities to foster this integration.

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