

Media Release

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New challenges in care of the dying

Patients with illnesses such as respiratory and heart disease could benefit from new approaches to palliative care, according to an editorial by Professor Simon Stewart, University of South Australia, in this month's *Australian Prescriber*.

Palliative care should therefore no longer be limited to patients with cancer. Care of the dying should not depend on what disease the patient has.

The end-stages of heart failure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a form of lung disease, have an outlook as gloomy as that of lung cancer, but the patients experience lower quality of life and a lack of continuity of care, according to studies examined in the editorial.

According to Professor Stewart, "it is particularly important for the clinician to remember to apply the principles of palliative care on the basis of 'need' rather than 'diagnosis'".

Although it is difficult to predict the length of life in people with COPD and heart failure, patients and their families will benefit from the same type of care as is offered to patients with cancer that is not responding to treatment.

Professor Stewart's editorial examines how providing palliative care to everyone who needs it, will challenge health professionals and patients alike. Funding restrictions will mean a pragmatic approach will be needed in allocating resources.

Lung cancer

In another article in *Australian Prescriber*, Professor Michael Boyer from the Department of Oncology at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney, looks at drug treatment of lung cancer, the commonest cause of cancer-related death in Australia.

Drug treatment is being increasingly used for the commonest type of lung cancer. New anticancer drugs used in combination with other treatments can produce better results in patients with advanced cancer.

Although the newer drugs available on the market have high response rates, combination treatments often produce better outcomes. According to Professor Boyer, "evidence available from recent studies suggests the newer drugs will need to be used in conjunction with other treatments rather than in place of them".

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