

New challenges in palliative care

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

Professor Stewart says that palliative care would no longer be limited to patients with cancer, however funding restrictions will mean a pragmatic approach will be needed in allocating resources.

Heart failure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) have similar prognoses to lung cancer, but the patient experiences lower quality of life and a lack of continuity of care, according to studies examined in the editorial.

According to Professor Stewart the change in perspective on palliative care means that "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 palliative care.

Professor Stewart's editorial examines how providing palliative care to everyone who needs it, will challenge health professionals and patients alike.

Drug treatment of lung cancer

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

80 per cent of lung cancers are non-small cell cancers. The use of chemotherapy for this cancer is increasing. According to Professor Boyer, this is predominantly due to new anticancer drugs and the use of combined modalities of treatment, which produce better results in patients with locally advanced disease.

Although the newer drugs available on the market produce 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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