

Enhanced Community End-of-Life Care Provision in Fife during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abbreviated abstract:

In Fife, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant proportion of NHS Fife Specialist Palliative Care resource was diverted towards community care. We examine trends in place of death prior to, and during, the pandemic and describe patterns of unscheduled care use close to death. Since the beginning of the pandemic, many more people in Fife have been cared for at home as they deteriorate, with fewer hospital admissions and more home deaths

Related publication:

Diernberger K, Luta X, Bowden J, Fallon M, Droney J, Lemmon E, Gray E, Marti J, Hall P. Healthcare use and costs in the last year of life: a national population data linkage study. *BMJ Support Palliat Care*. 2021

Background

Home is the preferred place of care and death for most people with advanced illness, providing sufficient support is available. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant proportion of NHS Fife Specialist Palliative Care Service (FSPCS) resource was diverted to community care

In April 2020, 22 whole time equivalent staff were diverted from inpatient hospice care to a new enhanced 7-day outreach service supporting community and acute hospital palliative care.

In practice, this involves:

- Healthcare assistants and band 5 nurses delivering personal care and patient/family support
- Band 6 clinical nurse specialists offering responsive clinical assessments
- A specialist occupational therapist offering functional assessments and tailored support
- Medics providing clinical leadership of complex clinical situations.

Study Aims and Methods

Aims:

- 1. To examine trends in place of death prior to, and during, the pandemic and to describe patterns of hospitalisation over the last months of life*
- 2. To explore the lived experience of patients, families and carers of end-of-life care in the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Methods:

A retrospective cohort study was undertaken, involving data linkage for all Fife decedents between April 2016 and March 2021, by Public Health Scotland Local Intelligence Support Team analysts working with FSPC clinicians.

Simple descriptive statistics characterised the cohort, their pathways and outcomes. In-depth interviews with patients, families and carers are underway to examine the reality of community end-of-life care. Research Ethics Committee approval was granted for this work which was funded by NHS Fife Charities.

Results and Conclusions

Over the four years prior to the pandemic, place of death remained relatively stable across Fife. Compared with the preceding 12 months, between April 2020 and March 2021:

- Of patients known to FSPCS, there was a 26% reduction in the number dying in hospital (170 fewer deaths) and a 57% increase in the number dying at home (158 more deaths)
- FSPCS patients spent 3,297 fewer days in hospital in their last 100 days of life (35% reduction) and 1,293 fewer days in their last 30 days (30% reduction)

"See that golden hour... when you are communicating with a family and what is going to happen next... what's on offer three times a day, this is what's going to happen, that's good communication. She was spot on with that... it just worked."

Bereaved wife whose husband died at home supported by FSPCS and Primary Care

Enhanced community specialist palliative care delivers value at individual and population levels by supporting people to be cared for and to die in their preferred place, whilst simultaneously reducing acute hospitalisation