Title: A Literature Review of Possible Barriers and Knowledge Gaps of General Practitioners in Implementing Advance Care Planning in Ireland: Experience from Other Countries

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Discussion Points:

What are general practitioner’s understanding of advance care plans?
What are general practitioner’s perspectives on advance care plans?
What barriers do general practitioners face in implementing advance care plans into daily clinical practice?

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ABSTRACT.

Background: An Advance Care Plan (ACP) is a process of decision-making concerning end of life care that embodies a patient's values and wishes, for a time when patients are unable to make such decisions for themselves. ACPs have been employed into medical practices worldwide; however, they remain largely uncompleted by general practitioners (GPs), regardless of their benefits to patients and their families with respect to end of life (EOL) care. Furthermore, ACPs will soon be implemented into clinician practices across Ireland, as part of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015. This review aims to explore the literature to examine challenges GPs may face in employing ACPs into clinical practice.

Methods: An electronic search was performed through three databases: PubMed, MEDLINE, and CINAHL Plus, through which a total of eleven studies met the selection criteria. Additionally, three studies were provided by experts in the field. Thus, a total of fourteen studies were condensed and critically appraised through CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Program), which concluded that the quality of the studies was high.

Conclusion: Through this review, knowledge gaps and barriers for GPs regarding ACPs were identified. Barriers for implementing ACPs into practice were categorized into three major themes: barriers for the GPs, barriers in the healthcare system, and barriers regarding the patient. These included insufficient time, complexity of the ACP documents themselves, uncertainty of the disease prognosis, and the ultimate fear of inducing anxiety and loss of hope in patients.

Key Words: General Practitioners; General Practice; Advance Care Planning; Advance Care; End of Life Care; Terminal Care (Source: MeSH-NLM).
INTRODUCTION

As technological and medical advances continue to improve, the average life-expectancy has correspondingly increased. As the population ages, complications regarding end of life (EOL) care become of great importance. Individuals hold certain preferences concerning their final days, which has created a large demand for Advance Care Planning.

An Advance Care Plan (ACP) provides instructions concerning healthcare practices that an individual may prefer at times when they no longer have the capacity to do so. It can be created voluntarily by patients over the age of 18 with decision-making capacity, and only comes into play if they lose this decision-making capacity in the future. ACPs take into consideration patients’ beliefs, values, and wishes about their healthcare and treatment preferences with regards to how they die. ACPs were originally created in the late 1990s in the United States of America. Although they have been around for many years, their utilization by physicians remains moderately low, especially in regions outside of the USA. It has been described that ACPs are more prevalent in the USA than throughout Europe.

There are numerous benefits of ACPs, as they allow patients to gain control of their own health, decrease anxiety regarding death, and ultimately reduce suffering and needless interventions that may unnecessarily prolong life. Furthermore, they have been shown to reduce worry and burden on patients’ families.

ACPs may progress to advance healthcare directives (AHCDs); however, AHCDs are legally assembled documents, whereas ACPs do not always necessitate documentation, and can be completed merely through discussions between the physician and patient. Additionally, AHCDs consider specific limited situations and treatments, and the refusal of such treatments, unlike ACPs.

It is suggested that ACPs should be conducted by the patient’s general practitioner (GP) as they are principally involved in EOL care. GPs have developed strong, trusting patient-physician relationships over the years that should facilitate such discussions, as patients may feel more at ease to discuss such material with a trustworthy doctor. ACPs are created with patients, their GP, and, at times, family members and other healthcare professionals. In order to initiate the process, GPs are required to assess their patient’s mental capacity. The capacity to make decisions has been described as, the ability to comprehend the significance and nature of the decision being made in the context of the options available. Moreover, an individual is required to understand, retain, and deliberate the information provided and then be able to effectively communicate their choice.

The exact completion of ACPs by GPs in Ireland is currently unknown, however it does remain fairly low. Furthermore, there is currently no legislation in action in Ireland to govern ACPs or AHCDs. The Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 was signed into Irish law on December 30th, 2015 to support an individual’s decision-making regarding EOL care. However, its commencement remains incomplete, as numerous challenges to the health sector regarding its implementation remain unsettled.
As previously mentioned, it has been advised that ACPs should be completed by a patient and their GP. However, previous studies have illustrated that majority of GPs do not complete ACPs, even though they are shown to improve patient satisfaction and quality of life\textsuperscript{16}. ACPs have been shown to increase relationship satisfaction between patients and their families, increase psychological well-being, and ultimately enlist a sense of control in patients\textsuperscript{20,21}. Nonetheless, it has been noted that Irish individuals are less likely to plan ahead for their own death, and thus this may create an additional barrier\textsuperscript{16}. This review thus aims to identify potential limitations in implementing ACPs into clinics, along with the current understanding and knowledge of GPs regarding ACPs, and the potential barriers they perceive regarding its employment into daily practice.

The aims of this study were to condense and appraise the existing literature regarding GPs perspectives regarding ACPs and their use in everyday clinical practice. The specific objectives were: (i) to establish the level of knowledge of GPs regarding ACPs; (ii) to establish the perspective of GPs regarding ACPs; and (iii) to establish the current barriers in implementing ACPs into daily clinical practice.
METHODS

Search Strategy

On 12th April 2019, electronic searches were conducted using a total of three databases to retrieve the relevant articles that may answer the research objectives of this review. The primary search was conducted through PubMed, and EBSCOhost research databases, which include MEDLINE and CINAHL Plus.

The following strategy was assumed: “Advance Care” [Title] AND “General Practice” [All Fields] or “General Pract*” [All Fields]

The equation initially generated 156 results from PubMed, 122 results from MEDLINE, and 45 results from CINAHL Plus. Any duplicates were removed. Inclusion and exclusion criteria, found in Table 1, were applied to the abstracts and then to the full articles remaining. This search yielded a total of eleven articles that were used in the review. Figure 1 details the search selection process. Critical appraisal was carried out on all 14 studies via CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Program), which concluded that the quality of the studies was high. 13 of the 14 studies used a qualitative methodology, so the CASP qualitative checklist was applied (Supplementary Table 2). Additionally, 2 studies conducted systematic reviews and thus the systematic review CASP checklist was utilized in these cases (Supplementary Table 3).

Selection Criteria

Table 1 depicts the article inclusion and exclusion criteria. Articles that were translated to the English language were excluded from this literature review to avoid errors attributed to translation. Due to the limited amount of research regarding the implementation of ACPs into clinical practice, there was no specific timeframe set for the articles. Also, articles that were not available as free full texts were excluded.

The 323 articles produced from the initial search using PubMed and the EBSCOhost Research Databases were filtered using the aforementioned criteria, and duplicates were removed. This resulted in 48 articles, that were then manually filtered by titles and abstracts. Articles without a methodology section, and articles considering EOL processes other than ACPs were removed, yielding 13 articles. These 13 articles were then reviewed as full-texts. Many articles considered the patient’s perspective regarding ACPs instead of that of the physician, and thus were removed. Furthermore, some articles only considered ACPs for dementia patients specifically and not the wider population, removing such articles yielded 11 articles. In addition, 3 articles were obtained through expert input in the field. These last 3 articles were utilized to create the questionnaire that will be implemented in the future study. Overall, there were a total of 14 articles used in the review to answer the objectives.

A summary flowchart depicting the study selection process is illustrated in Figure 1.
RESULTS
The 14 studies included in the review were conducted in the UK, Belgium, Australia, Canada, the USA, and the Netherlands (Figure 2). Of these 14 qualitative studies, 5 used semi-structured interviews, 5 used questionnaires, 2 used focus groups, 1 used a systematic literature review, and 1 used both a literature review and focus group approach. All results relevant to the current review are summarized in Supplementary Table 4.

Of the 323 relevant articles found, 11 records met the selection criteria. Additionally, 3 studies were included through recommendation by experts in the field; thus, 14 studies in total were reviewed. The use of qualitative methodology was appropriate, as the studies set out to determine the subjective experience and perspective of GPs regarding ACPs. In studies involving interviews, the presence of interview bias was at times unknown. However, one study did mention that interview biases may have played a role, as the interviewer was a member of the faculty that was being interviewed, which may have altered the findings. Furthermore, one of the studies conducting surveys did not base their questionnaire off of a previously validated survey and did not discuss how they developed their own survey. It was therefore assumed that the questionnaire utilized was not validated. Additionally, in one of the studies conducting systemic reviews, the methodology of the included articles was inconsistent, hence combining their results may not be accurate.

Themes
Current Knowledge of GPs regarding ACPs
This review found that the current understanding of GPs concerning ACPs is inadequate. GPs are unsure of when and how to initiate EOL care discussions. They have not received adequate training regarding ACP documents, including how to initiate such a sensitive topic and whom to include in the process. It was also shown that ACPs are conducted in a distinct manner, depending on if they are completed in an out-patient versus in-patient setting, and in rural or urban areas. No single technique has been implemented in conducting ACPs across different settings, hence, the understanding of ACPs by GPs is fairly poor.

Barriers in Implementing ACPs into Clinical Practice
All fourteen studies revealed overlapping barriers for implementing ACPs into practice that fell into three categories: barriers for the GP, barriers in the healthcare system itself, and barriers involving the patients (Figure 3). Each of these will be described independently below.

Barriers for the GP
Twelve studies determined barriers for healthcare workers in conducting ACPs. Nine studies looked solely at GPs. From these studies, one of the main barriers for GPs included the fear of eliciting anxiety and loss of hope in their patients, as well as imposing personal distress on themselves. GPs were also unsure on when to introduce such discussions and whom to involve, such as family members or other healthcare professionals. Even when ACPs were initiated, many GPs felt a lack of confidence in their abilities, due to their poor understanding of ACPs and scarce EOL care experience.
The current healthcare system has not appropriately prepared GPs to initiate ACPs. Essentially, there is insufficient time available in consultations to complete such a process and provide empathy for family members and the patient themselves\textsuperscript{3,11,17,22,24}. Likewise, there is no means of compensation provided for conducting ACPs, which leaves little incentive for GPs to complete them\textsuperscript{23}. Additionally, there is no means of communication between GPs and specialist physicians that take over patient care towards the EOL or in debilitating conditions, thus hindering GPs from proceeding with ACPs\textsuperscript{1,3,16}.

Furthermore, the process itself is tedious and paper-based. As many GP practices have shifted towards electronic databases, paper-based documentation is unsuitable\textsuperscript{19,24}. The healthcare system has not created a single system to incorporate ACPs into practice with ease, which impedes physicians’ confidence levels regarding their execution\textsuperscript{16,17}.

Barriers Involving the Patient
ACP discussions can involve family members; however, many members may be in denial of their loved one’s diagnosis or have disagreements concerning their preference of care. This can result in added difficulty for physicians to commence the necessary modifications required to ensure that patients’ EOL care needs are met\textsuperscript{1,13}. Multiple studies concluded that lack of understanding of the diagnosis, disease trajectory, and available treatment options for both the GP and the patient were probable barriers\textsuperscript{2,3,11,17,23,24}. Additionally, patients lack an understanding of ACPs, as no information about ACPs is provided to patients, which in itself, hinders such a process\textsuperscript{24}. It was also illustrated that many patients’ requests are vague and may change overtime, making it difficult to meet their needs based on the resources currently available in the health system\textsuperscript{2,3}.
DISCUSSION

This review attempted to explore the current knowledge of GPs regarding ACPs, and the barriers that exist concerning their implementation into everyday clinical practice.

Knowledge of GPs regarding ACPs

GPs were unsure of when to initiate such discussion with regards to diagnoses, as patients and their families require time to understand and come to terms with their illnesses\(^2\). Differences amongst GPs also occurred when defining ACPs, as GPs in rural and urban regions had divergent opinions and understanding of the process itself\(^1\).

Barriers for ACP Implementation

Studies found that previous experiences with ACPs and EOL care improved the skills of GPs and thus facilitated discussions\(^3\). However, De Vleminck et al (2013) found that younger GPs were more likely to initiate discussions compared to older and more experienced physicians. Therefore, future studies are needed to determine the influence of years of experience on ACP employment.

There were contradictory findings regarding the length of relationship between the physician and patient and the ease of ACP discussions. Having a stronger relationship with the physician allows patients to feel comfortable when discussing such topics\(^2,14,17,24\); however, it was suggested that having such a relationship with patients may actually hinder GPs’ tendencies to participate in such discussions, due to the emotional impact it causes them\(^1\). Nonetheless, GPs had no concern that having such discussions with their patients would ruin their relationship\(^24\). Thus, obtaining further information regarding patient-physician relationship dynamics and the ease of implementing ACPs is needed.

Results regarding interprofessional teams and ACPs also varied. Some studies found that involving other health professionals facilitated EOL discussions, as they specified treatments available that GPs may be unaware of\(^2,24\). While others discovered that other health professionals lacked role understanding, which resulted in inadequate communication between team members, and ultimately hindered the overall process\(^3,16\).

Direct comparison of these studies is difficult, as each one used different methodologies. The studies that utilized questionnaires had developed their questionnaires in a distinct manner and had included diverse questions. The sample sizes of 8 of the 14 studies was fairly small, and, thus, the findings may not be applicable on a larger scale. As participation in all studies was voluntary, it is uncertain if the findings are truly representative of the greater population. Similarly, the process of data collection could introduce biases, as many of the surveys and interview questions were not validated or provided in the articles themselves. Also, the studies included in the analysis were not conducted in a similar manner, thus results obtained could differ amongst the studies themselves. Additionally, only full free texts were included in this review, which does not represent all of the data available. Furthermore, as only one individual evaluated each of the papers in this review, the chance of error in interpretation is not fully removed.

The studies involved did not restrict their use of ACPs to a certain group of illnesses and can be applicable to ACP implementation for a wider array of diseases and health conditions. Likewise, GPs from diverse regions
were incorporated into the studies, suggesting that the findings can be applied on a larger scale. Additionally, many of the studies had one lead researcher transcribing and encoding the data, which eliminates biases regarding data analysis.

**Conclusion**

It has been suggested that ACPs should be completed by patients’ GPs, as they play a central role in the care of patients, yet numerous barriers regarding its completion in clinical practice have been revealed. Lack of knowledge and time, and the fear of provoking anxiety in patients were all found to be potential barriers. There is a lack of data assessing the understanding and knowledge of Irish GPs regarding ACPs, as the Irish healthcare system greatly differs from the studies explored in this review. There is however, an increased need to effectively understand the potential barriers and knowledge of Irish GPs, as ACPs will be incorporated into clinical practices in Ireland through the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 in the near future.
REFERENCES.


FIGURES AND TABLES.

Figure 1. Selection Process Flow Chart

EBSCOhost: n=167
1. MEDLINE: n=122
2. CINAHL Plus: n=45

Exclusion criteria:
- Language
- Not a free text
  (n=135)

(n=52)

Duplicates removed
(n=30)

(n=22)

PubMed: n=156

Exclusion criteria:
- Language
- Not a free text
  (n=101)

(n=55)

Duplicates removed
(n=18)

(n=37)

Expert input
(n=3)

Duplicates removed
(n=11)

(n=48)

Inappropriate titles or inclusion criteria not met through abstracts
(n=35)

Full text reviewed
(n=13)

Articles in review:
(n=14)

Included in review
(n=11)
Figure 2. Demographics of Included Studies

Demographics of Studies Included

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3. Major Themes of Articles

![Bar chart showing article themes](image)

- **Barriers for the GP**: 12 articles
- **Barriers in the Health Care System**: 12 articles
- **Barriers Involving the Patient**: 9 articles
### Table 1. Selection Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusion Criteria</th>
<th>Exclusion Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessed GPs perspectives towards ACPs</td>
<td>Articles not available as free full texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluated GPs’ knowledge of ACPs</td>
<td>Studies not written in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluated barriers for GPs regarding ACPs</td>
<td>Studies conducted on animal populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessed ACPs implementation into clinical practice</td>
<td>Studies were part of book chapters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studies conducted on the human population</td>
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<tr>
<td>Studies available in English</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Articles available as free full texts</td>
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## Supplementary Material

### Supplementary Table 2: Summary of Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) Qualitative Checklist Findings

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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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## Supplementary Table 3: Summary of Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) Systematic Review Checklist Findings

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## Supplementary Table 4. Summary of Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, (Year), Location, Title</th>
<th>Objective(s)</th>
<th>Study Design, Sample Size</th>
<th>Key Findings (relevant to current study)</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Boyd et al. (2010)**          | To assess the feasibility of implementing ACP in general practice | Mixed methods (including semi-structured interviews and telephone interviews)  
20 GPs and 8 community nurses  
N=32 | • Younger doctors had no experience of ACPs compared to older doctors  
• GPs keen to undergo training regarding EOL discussions  
• GPs considered experience with ACPs more beneficial than knowledge about ACPs  
Barriers for ACP discussions:  
• Fear of destroying coping strategies and eliciting fear in patients  
• Unclear understanding of ACPs  
• Paper-based documents | • Considered a diverse group of primary care professionals not just solely GPs  
• Same researcher conducted all interviews | • Workshops discussed slightly different topics  
• All participants initially had no understanding of ACPs  
• GPs with experience with oncology only enrolled  
• Different interview environments as Interviews were conducted at each GPs practice, or over the phone,  
• Only considered 4 GP practices |
| **Minto F., and Strickland K. (2011)** | To explore experiences of GPs and direct nurses involved in EOL care and ACP  
To find factors that hinder or assist ability to engage in ACP and EOL discussions | Semi-structured interviews  
3 GPs and 3 direct nurses  
N=6 | • Mixed results on the impact of GP-patient relationship dynamics and ease of ACP discussions  
Barriers for ACP discussions  
• Emotional impact on GP  
• Inability to meet patient’s expectations regarding treatment and EOL care based on the resources available  
• Availability of equipment was a bigger issue than time constraints and workload  
• Sense of guilt if unable to deliver care that patient desired  
• Difficult to support family members | • The same lead researcher transcribed and conducted each interview  
• Interview recordings were verified and edited by participants to ensure no loss of meaning | • Unknown if having a nurse conduct ACPs would allow for better care due to their relationship dynamics with the patient  
• Different interview environments as Interviews were conducted at each GPs practice  
• Small sample size (n=6)  
• Lead researcher was a clinical nurse specialist which could have led to biases in the results |
| **De Vleminck et al. (2013)** | To determine the factors that hinder or facilitate GPs in engaging in ACPs | Systematic review  
16 articles | Barriers for ACP discussions:  
• Unaware of when to initiate discussion + whom to approach  
• GP’s lack of knowledge and skills  
• Vague requests made by patients  
• Belief that GPs role is to cure  
• Fear of upsetting patient  
• GP’s uncertainty of disease trajectories | • Articles included came from diverse countries  
• Considered barriers from the perspective of the physician and the healthcare system itself | • All studies used different methods thus unable to combine for meta-analysis  
• Biases in articles chosen and their findings |
| **Care Planning: A Systematic Review** | | | |
| Care planning: a systematic review | | | |
| No initiation by the patient | Systematic steps conducted twice by two different reviewers | |
| Patients’ knowledge of illness diagnosis/prognosis/trajectory | | |
| Facilitators for ACP discussions: | | |
| • GPs having a living will themselves | Interviews conducted by the same person | |
| • Attitude that a GP should initiate EOL discussions | • Asked exact same questions | |
| • Longstanding relationship with patient | • Transcribed by a professional agency | |
| • Consultation with other HCWs | • Participants recruited through various manners, thus representative | |
| • Younger GPs more likely to initiate discussion | • Use of open-ended questions makes it difficult to analyze the data | |
| • Legal support | • Small sample size | |
| • Financial compensation for time spent on ACPs | • Interview was conducted by a GP (response bias) | |
| To determine factors that influence ACP implementation from the GPs perspective | Semi-structured interviews | N=17 | Barriers for ACP discussions: |
| • Mixed feelings on legal status of ACPs and ease of implementation | | | • Accessibility/ease of ACP documents, especially in after-hours and emergencies |
| Barriers for ACP discussions: | | | • Patients’ knowledge of illness diagnosis/prognosis |
| • Many were not familiar with the term ACP | | | • Patient’s being in denial |
| • Many GPs had conducted ACPs previously but in an informal manner with no documentation | | | • Patient’s family dynamics |
| • Previous positive experiences facilitated ACP discussions | | | • Not being able to meet patients’ wishes due to over-investigations |
| Barriers for ACP discussions: | | | **De Vleminck et al. (2014)** | **Flanders, Belgium** | **Barriers to advance care planning in cancer, heart failure, and dementia patients: a focus group study on general practitioners’** | |
| To identify barriers for GPs in initiating ACPs | Focus groups | N=36 | Barriers for ACP discussions: |
| To determine the different barriers for GPs between health conditions | | | • Lack of communication between specialists and GPs |
| | | | • Decreased contact between GPs and cancer patients due to transfer of care |
| | | | • GP’s knowledge and confidence levels |
| | | | **Considered various illnesses (cancer, heart failure, and dementia) and barriers for initiating ACPs individually** |
| | | | **Had rural and urban focus groups to determine if any differences were present** |
| | | | **Focus groups did not consist of equal number of participants** |
| | | | **Mainly male and older GPs in study** |
| | | | **GPs with experience in palliative care** |
| | | | **Changed topic of focus group after the first two groups were completed** |
| | | | **Small sample size** |
views and experiences

Understanding patients’ and doctors’ attitudes about shared decision making for advance care planning

To determine the current use and attitudes regarding shared decision making and ACPs
Semi-structured Interviews
11 Patients and 5 doctors N =11

Barriers for shared decision making:
- Different cultural backgrounds
- Language barriers
- Lack of patient empowerment
- Patients’ knowledge of illness diagnosis/prognosis
- Lack of time
- GP’s understanding of illness prognosis

Most doctors prefer SDM, yet they ultimately seem to be making the final decision for the patient
Doctors strongly believe that they should be involved and initiate EOL discussions
Doctors believe that ACPs should be conducted in the community and not hospitals, mainly with their GPs

Interviews were closed-ended questions and easy to quantify
Interviewers were all trained in a similar manner
Transcribed via a constant comparative analysis

Only 5 doctors were interviewed (small sample size)
Interviews were conducted by different people
Participants were largely white middle-aged males
Difficult to interpret interviews

You et al. (2015) Canada (British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba, and Newfoundland and Labrador)
Barriers to Goals of Care Discussions with Seriously Ill Hospitalized Patients and Their Families

To determine hospital-based physicians’ perspectives about:
- Barriers impeding communication and decision-making regarding goals of care with terminally ill patients and their families
Cross-sectional Self-administered web and paper questionnaires N=1256

Barriers for ACP discussions:
- Patient and family’s difficulty in prognosis acceptance
- Patients and family’s knowledge of illness diagnosis/prognosis/trajectory
- Lack of agreement amongst families regarding EOL care
- Lack of patient’s capacity

Minor barriers for ACP discussions
- Legal concerns
- Lack of knowledge and skills
- Lack of time

Survey developed in 3 stages
Both web and paper surveys
Very large sample size
Variety of HCWs enrolled (nurses, residents, and physicians)
13 hospitals enrolled
77.7% response rate

Only considers hospital-based clinicians not GPs
Did not consider all hospital HCWs that could possibly take part in ACPs
Response bias
Recall bias
HCWs were all from teaching hospitals
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Brazili et al. (2015)**<sup>1</sup>  
Northern Ireland, UK  
General practitioners’ perceptions on advance care planning for patients living with dementia<sup>1</sup> | To determine preferences and attitudes of GPs regarding decision-making for patients with dementia | Cross-sectional posted survey  
N=133 | GPs require training on discussing ACPs with families  
GP’s relationship with the patient and their family facilitates discussions  
Barriers for ACP discussions:  
- Uncertainty of when to initiate conversation  
- Uncertainty of disease prognosis  
- Early discussions triggered anxiety in patients  
- Lack of family’s understanding of therapies and prognosis  
61% of the surveyed practices provided a response  
Mean years of practice was 24.7 years | Physicians in 5 different provinces enrolled  
Questionnaires were specific to each HCWs role  
French and English surveys used and translated by bilingual members for accuracy  
101 out of 133 practices provided a response  
Mean years of practice was 24.7 years  
Barriers for ACP discussions:  
- Uncertainty of when to initiate conversation  
- Uncertainty of disease prognosis  
- Early discussions triggered anxiety in patients  
- Lack of family’s understanding of therapies and prognosis  
61% of the surveyed practices provided a response  
Mean years of practice was 24.7 years |
| **Fletcher et al. (2016)**<sup>2</sup>  
Western Australia  
Rural health professionals’ experience in implementing advance care planning: a focus group study<sup>2</sup> | To identify the:  
- Perceptions of HCWs with ACP  
- Systemic issues regarding ACP  
- Training needs for ACP | 10 focus groups consisting of GPs, GP registrars, and nurses  
N=55 | Different HCWs have a different understanding of ACPs  
ACPs are conducted differently in hospital and community-based practices  
Rural and urban GPs have differences in opinion on whether or not to document ACP discussions  
Barriers for ACP discussions:  
- Lack of knowledge and confidence  
- Lack of time  
- Unable to preserve hope in patients  
- Complexity of ACPs  
- No single system on how to develop ACPs  
- Interprofessional teams and lack of role understanding  
Used intra-professional focus groups instead of interprofessional to eliminate power relationships from playing a role  
Data analyzed by the same researcher | Mixed reviews on when EOL discussions should be held  
Did not consider how to provide information and understanding to families  
Only considered GP practices with registered dementia patients  
Responder bias  
Only considered rural HCWs  
Qualitative study – interpretation methods  
Small sample size |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Facilitators for ACP discussions:</th>
<th>Barriers for ACP discussions:</th>
<th>Considered diverse barriers and implemented interventions to overcome</th>
<th>Small sample size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De Vleminck et al. (2016) Brussels, Belgium</td>
<td>• Previous positive experience with ACPs</td>
<td>• Lack of knowledge/confidence</td>
<td>• Considered barriers from the perspective of the physician and the healthcare system itself</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development of a complex intervention to support the initiation of advance care planning by general practitioners in patients at risk of deteriorating or dying: a phase 0-1 study¹¹</td>
<td>To identify the attitudes and concerns of GPs regarding initiating ACPs</td>
<td>• Lack of time</td>
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<td></td>
<td>literature review and focus groups n = 36</td>
<td>• Unsure of components of ACPs</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Uncertainty of when to initiate conversation</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Worry of creating anxiety or decreasing hope in patients</td>
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<td>• Uncertainty of disease trajectories</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Patients’ knowledge of illness diagnosis/prognosis</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• No central system to document patient’s wishes</td>
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<td>• Inability to determine capacity</td>
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<td>• Legal implications</td>
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<td>• Uncertainty about the usefulness of ACPs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fan E., and Rhee J.J. (2017) New South Wales, UK</td>
<td>To understand practice nurses’ beliefs, attitudes, and confidence regarding ACPs</td>
<td>• ACPs should not be solely done by GPs</td>
<td>• Survey was created by a team with expertise in ACP and palliative care, that consisted of GPs and registered nurses</td>
<td>Most nurses were female</td>
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<tr>
<td>A self-reported survey on the confidence levels and motivation of New South Wales practice nurses on conducting advance-care planning (ACP) initiatives in the general-practice setting³³</td>
<td>Online cross-sectional survey N=147</td>
<td>• ACPs should be conducted in the community and not hospitals</td>
<td>• Actual knowledge about ACPs was not tested</td>
<td>Mainly consisted of rural nurses</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Uncertainty of patient’s capacity</td>
<td>• Responder bias</td>
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<td>• Lack of funding and time</td>
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<td>• Uncertainty if wishes will be met</td>
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<td>• Uncertainty of disease prognosis and trajectory</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Personal discomfort</td>
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<td>• Patients knowledge of ACPs</td>
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<td>• Lack of information regarding ACPs for patients</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Country/Region</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Barriers for ACP discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Howard et al. (2018)</td>
<td>Canada (Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia)</td>
<td>Cross-sectional Self-administered survey</td>
<td>117 GPs and 64 other HCWs N=181</td>
<td>· Perception that it is the GPs’ job to cure patients, that patients should initiate discussions were not barriers</td>
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<td>Scholten et al. (2018)</td>
<td>Flanders, Belgium</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
<td>502 citizens and 117 GPs N = 619</td>
<td>· Lack of time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wichmann et al. (2018)</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>N=17</td>
<td>· Difficult topic to bring up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The Patient-nurse relationship dynamics influence ease of discussion
- Perceived knowledge of ACPs correlated with discussion confidence
- Training enhances confidence

Survey originated from previous validated study and further developed on by GPs and HCWS
- Open-ended questions included at the end of the questionnaire
- 2 analysts coded all comments made
- GPS in 3 different provinces enrolled
- Large sample size (n=181)

- Considered patients older than 50
- Responder bias

- Large sample size
- Considered well individuals not terminally ill
- Citizens were over the age of 64, which is younger than similar previous studies conducted

- Not a validated survey
- Responder bias
- Survey only provided in Dutch

- Transcribed via an official agency
- Constant comparative method used for data analysis
- Participants had strong knowledge regarding ACPs

- GPs were recruited from an ACP training program, thus not representative of the wider population
- Different interview methods used (face-to-face, or telephone)
### Palliative Patients: Looking through the GP’s Eyes

- Emotional impact on GP
- Lack of time
- Uncertainty of when to initiate conversation, especially if patients still being treated in the hospital
- Anxious patients
- GPs personal beliefs conflict with patients
- Lack of communication between GPs and specialists

#### Interviews conducted in Dutch
- Various interview locations could cause confounders
- Small sample size
- Use of open-ended questions makes it difficult to analyze the results

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Legend: ACP, Advance Care Planning. EOL, End of Life. GP, General Practitioner. HCW, Healthcare Worker.