



# AQUIFER PALLIATIVE CARE PROJECT

JANUARY 2022

Standardizing **Primary Palliative Care Education** for Medical & Health Professions Students

## PRIMARY PALLIATIVE CARE CASES COMING IN JULY 2022

Aquifer—supported by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations—is advancing the development of a national, standardized curriculum and online course that addresses critical gaps in palliative care learning across undergraduate medical and health professions education. The Aquifer Palliative Care Leadership Team, a group of expert interprofessional clinician educators, is now developing a new course—“Principles and Practice of Excellence in Primary Palliative Care”—guided by the vision and principles determined in the earlier phases of the project.

Although palliative care is an established specialty, all clinicians should have the skills to provide patient-centered care. Primary palliative care knowledge and skills are critical, but most healthcare professionals never receive standardized primary palliative care education. By focusing on primary palliative care, the course broadens the reach beyond the specialty—moving toward overcoming clinician shortages, lack of access, and lack of training—to improve outcomes and quality of life for seriously ill patients and their families.



### VISION:

Improve the capacity of the US health professions student to deliver humanistic, compassionate interprofessional care centered around patient goals of care and quality of life by applying evidence-based methods to alleviate the suffering of seriously ill patients and their families through the delivery of primary palliative care.



## PROJECT TIMELINE

### September 2020

Grant support awarded to Aquifer from Arthur Vining Davis Foundations

### November 2020

Interprofessional Aquifer Palliative Care Leadership Team formed

### January - April 2021

Stakeholder Needs Assessment

- Faculty Survey
- Student & Faculty Focus Groups

### January - April 2021

Literature review

### June 2021

Consensus Conference Vision & Principles Identified

### July - September 2021

Learning objectives established

### October 2021

Case authoring begins

### July 1, 2022

Initial set of cases available to Aquifer Curricular Partners

### Future:

Additional cases & teaching tools developed

# Identifying Gaps

Research findings from stakeholder surveys & focus groups identified many common challenges that national standardized curricula and learning tools could address.

## STUDENTS & FACULTY AGREE

**50%** of students are **not prepared for serious illness conversations**

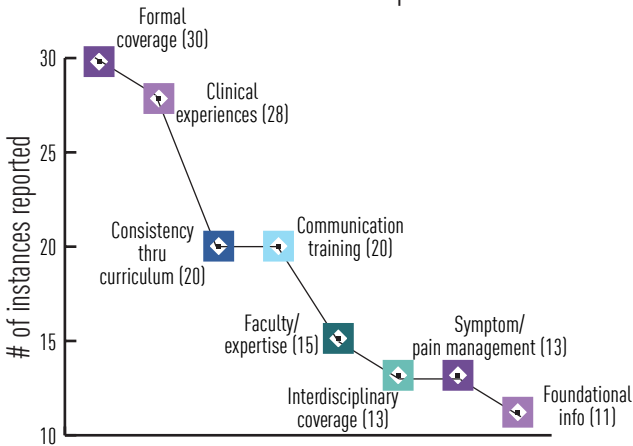
FACULTY FEEDBACK

“Palliative care & end of life care are **ubiquitously under-represented topics** in the medical school curriculum.”

GAPS: FACULTY VIEW

### COVERAGE, CONSISTENCY & COMMUNICATION

What gaps, if any, do you see in your curriculum related to palliative care?



GAPS: STUDENT VIEW

### BASIC KNOWLEDGE, ROLES & MANAGING CONFLICT

Students felt unprepared related to:

- 1 Differences between palliative care & hospice; managing care transitions
- 2 Approaching serious illness conversations/ understanding student role
- 3 Navigating patient/family/team conflicts
- 4 Managing pain and opioids
- 5 Addressing spiritual and cultural issues and their impact on decisions



STUDENT FEEDBACK

“If more students understand the role of palliative care, they will advocate for more patients to have it.”

## Key Themes

Common themes emerged from faculty and student feedback:

Family meetings & conflict management

Recognizing syndromes & signs of dying

Interprofessional teams

Processing personal emotions

**Communication Skills**

Symptom management

Pain management & opioids

Interdisciplinary cases through the lifespan

Definitions & foundational knowledge

Social determinants of health & cultural understanding

**Palliative care vs. hospice**

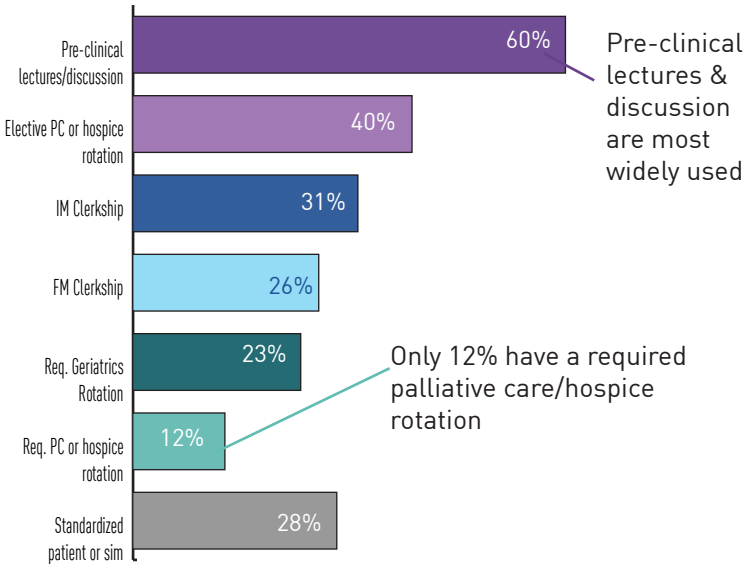
SOURCES

Faculty Survey (Feb 2021); 237 respondents from MD, DO, PA & NP programs.  
 Faculty Focus Groups (March 2021); 30 participants from MD, DO, PA, & NP programs.  
 Student Focus Group (Feb 2021): 14 participants (2 PA students, 5 2nd-year medical students, 5 3rd-year medical students)

# Curricular Integration

## WHERE & WHEN PALLIATIVE CARE TEACHING HAPPENS NOW

Faculty responses to the survey question: Where/when do students learn about palliative care in your program?



FACULTY FEEDBACK

“The student experience is quite variable since there is **no standard guideline or requirement** to incorporate palliative care teaching.”

STUDENT FEEDBACK

“I was uncertain about who (resident, attending, consults, me) was supposed to communicate with patients and families in difficult cases. It would be **helpful to understand everyone’s role** before being in the hospital.”

## STUDENTS WANT LONGITUDINAL LEARNING IN PALLIATIVE CARE EDUCATION

Students reported a strong desire for longitudinal education tailored to their readiness to help their skills and understanding evolve.

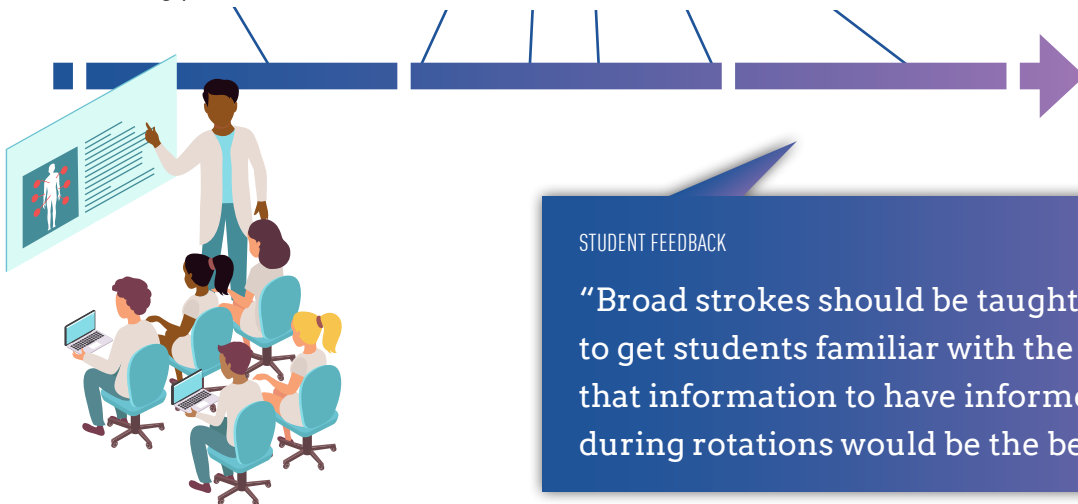
### PRE-CLINICAL COURSES

Introduce concepts to prepare for seeing patients

### RELEVANT CLERKSHIPS

Reinforce concepts, experience clinical application

INTERNAL MEDICINE • PEDIATRICS • FAMILY MEDICINE • GERIATRICS  
DEDICATED PALLIATIVE CARE ROTATIONS



STUDENT FEEDBACK

“Broad strokes should be taught in the pre-clerkship to get students familiar with the topic. Then using that information to have informed discussions during rotations would be the best strategy.”

# PRINCIPLES OF PRIMARY PALLIATIVE CARE EXCELLENCE

Based on a comprehensive needs assessment, the Aquifer Palliative Care Leadership Team determined the Principles of Primary Palliative Care Excellence to elevate the primary palliative care education and training of all US health professions students, regardless of discipline. Each principle supports the advancement of primary palliative care as a competency for all healthcare professionals.



**1** Alignment of care with the goals, values, and preferences of seriously ill patients based on assessed need.



**2** Interprofessional collaboration and care coordination between patients, families, healthcare teams, and systems.



**3** Evidence-based and holistic approach that addresses the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual domains across the illness trajectory from diagnosis to end-of-life.



**4** Equitable access to high-quality, culturally sensitive palliative care services for all patient populations.



**5** Education and advocacy to promote palliative care as a gold standard for serious illness care.



## Aquifer Case Development & Topics

Primary palliative care cases are in development. The initial set of cases will be available to Aquifer Curricular Partners (programs that subscribe to all five Aquifer Signature courses) on July 1, 2022. Cases will feature: videos modeling communication, authentic clinical experiences, opportunities to reflect on personal emotions, and expert advice on common dilemmas and avoiding pitfalls. Topics include:



- + Principles of palliative care
- + Palliative care assessment
- + Family meetings & establishing goals of care
- + Advanced directives
- + Pediatric palliative care

- + Interprofessional roles & responsibilities as it relates to palliative care
- + Supporting patients and families in the grieving process
- + Anxiety, depression, and delirium in the context of palliative care

- + Pain management overview, pharmacologic approaches for common problems
- + Understanding of current disparities in care/outcomes for patients with serious illness
- + Non-pain symptom management

## AQUIFER PALLIATIVE CARE LEADERSHIP TEAM

### Academic Leads:

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