

Challenges for HPC Volunteering in Europe

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Introduction

Volunteers offer the gift of presence, different skills, experience and time. In some European countries they are and will continue to be essential to providing hospice and palliative care (HPC) services as an integral part of a comprehensive highly professional HPC settings.

However, hospice and palliative care services face many challenges and alongside this a new generation of volunteers have different expectations of volunteering. Many have less time to give. Some are no longer content with traditional roles and want to use their skills in different and more meaningful ways.



Delegates at the 2nd Symposium Colourful Life of Hospice Volunteers in Europe, Vienna 9th April 2015.

Approach

Based on early findings from research, symposia and meetings of European Association for Palliative Care (EAPC) Task Force on Volunteering in HPC this poster explores some of the challenges for the development of volunteering in hospice and palliative care in Europe including:

- The relationship between the values and principles of HPC and volunteering.
- Understanding and recognising the place of volunteers within the multi-professional team.
- The influence of culture on volunteering.
- Balancing the changing expectations of organisations with those of volunteers.

Culture politics and volunteering

- Volunteering is strongly influenced by national history and culture.
- Generally volunteering levels are greater in countries with democratic political traditions.
- Culture and economics can also influence the typical age group of volunteers.
- National political systems and policy can empower or present barriers to volunteering.
- In some countries legislation and regulation influence the parameters of volunteering.

Aligning values, principles and role

- The values of HPC and volunteering are closely linked – the volunteer intention is to “give time freely to support quality of life”.
- Volunteers roles contribute to patient dignity.
- Volunteers in some countries are involved in supporting patients with individual planning and decision making.
- The uniqueness of the volunteer role is important in contributing to a truly holistic approach to care.
- HPC is historically based on volunteering.
- Volunteers have a unique role alongside professionals and family care givers.

Challenges and changing expectations

Challenges for organisations:

- Increasing demand for HPC: more patients, more complex conditions, new patient groups.
- Increasing challenges in securing funding.
- More volunteers required to deliver services.
- Adequate financial resources required for volunteering – it is not free.
- Embedding the unique place of volunteers within the multi-professional team.
- Retaining trained volunteers.

Volunteers' expectations:

- Less time, more choice in how to spend it.
- Expect more from us - 'high level' involvement.
- Expect more equality in the professional-volunteer relationship.

Conclusion

Volunteers are a vital part of the future of HPC and an expression of a caring community. For volunteering to develop successfully we must match the changing needs of our patients, families and organisations with the changing expectations of tomorrow's volunteers. Above all, we must recognise that volunteering is not just about tasks but about people, caring and relationships. Volunteers transform lives.