A snapshot of palliative care service provision in rural Western Australia 2010

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Background: Palliative care services in rural Western Australia developed in an ad hoc nature. A state-wide audit of rural health services in 2006 reported great diversity in palliative care provision (n=139). The services had varied access to experienced palliative care staff, differing models of service provision and limited links with specialist palliative care providers. A follow-up survey was conducted to examine service provision in 2010.

Aim: The aim of this paper is to present a snapshot of palliative care in rural WA in 2010 and changes in care provision between 2006 and 2010.

Methods: A telephone survey was conducted with regional health services in WA. The survey comprised 36 questions in four areas: provision of services and patient care/outcomes; delivering palliative care; assessment and care planning; and support to deliver services.

Results: 136 health services reported 2781 people who received palliative care and 1178 palliative care deaths in regional WA in 2010. This was a 42% increase in patient numbers since 2006 and the number of patients with non-malignant illness significantly increased. There was an increase in services with access to multidisciplinary teams and an increase in formalised links with metropolitan palliative care providers. There was a reduction in services providing after-hours care and a decrease in bereavement support provided.

Relevance: The results of this survey highlight improvements and ongoing challenges for palliative care service provision in rural WA. Findings may assist in further development of services.

Conclusions: There have been some significant changes to palliative care service provision in the last few years. These changes reflect an increased workload in palliative care and may also represent greater recognition of the need for palliative care provision for patients previously not considered for palliative care.