

BOOKS

Filling a gap in palliative care

Pallium Palliative Pocketbook:

A peer-reviewed, referenced resource
Pallium Canada; 2013

This is truly an exciting time to be in the field of palliative medicine. The field has been recognized as a two-year subspecialty by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, and the Canadian Medical Association recently hosted nationwide discussions about end-of-life care. However, there have been some definite, persistent gaps in physicians' proficiency in providing palliative and end-of-life care. When I trained in medicine, palliative medicine was an esoteric art, practised only by the few who were vested in its mystical methods. Palliative and end-of-life care needed to become mainstream. Stepping into the void in 2001 was the Canadian Pallium Project — now called Pallium Canada — to help educate doctors and nurses in evidence-based palliative care. *The Pallium Palliative Pocketbook* (first edition, third printing) builds on Pallium Canada's other educational resources such as the LEAP (Learning Essential Approaches to Palliative and End-of-Life Care) course.

This ambitious pocketbook has become a great back-up resource to the LEAP course for our local medical and nursing colleagues. There wasn't a clinical question in palliative medicine that this extremely comprehensive book couldn't answer. This book could not be stumped. But this push for comprehensiveness has led to some minor drawbacks. The print size is quite small for over-40-year-old eyes. And until you have a good sense of how to navigate the book, it can be hard to quickly find exactly what you want. Having said that, the chapter index is a big help — and now that I have been using this



Photos.com

book for a few months, I can find what I need without too much delay. The book would be improved by a quick reference section and some easy-to-find pain and symptom algorithms.

What is quite valuable is the effort put into the “softer” parts of palliative care, in the chapters on ethics, communication and spiritual care. It has certainly been validating to see, in print, the approach to communication that we all assume that others are using in looking after patients who require palliative care. For those clinicians who are very new to end-of-life discussions, the sample questions and scripts would be extremely useful. Similarly, the cross-cultural spiritual care references (especially the references to death and burial customs) were a surprise to find and a delight to read.

Sadly, access to hospice palliative and end-of-life care services is available to only 16%–30% of Canadians when they die, according to the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association. As

palliative and end-of-life issues are appearing more in the public consciousness — witness the recent Quebec legislation and the upcoming Supreme Court of Canada decision — all primary care physicians in Canada should be well-trained in the actual practice of palliative medicine. Using Pallium Canada's educational resources such as the LEAP course and *The Pallium Palliative Pocketbook*, clinicians can be reassured that they are applying Canadian evidence-based best practices. High-quality palliative medicine resources, like this pocketbook, are available to all physicians in Canada. Not all of us will be specialists in end-of-life care, but we can all offer our patients access to the best death possible.

Jason Malinowski MD

Medical Advisor
Madawaska Valley Hospice Palliative
Care Program
Barry's Bay, Ont.

CMAJ 2015. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.140678