

Manifesto for sustainable research in palliative care and end of life care in Switzerland

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We, the researchers in the field of palliative care and end of life care research, state that Switzerland has made considerable progress in terms of research activities in palliative care and end of life care over the last decade. This improvement becomes evident in the number of publications, in the increase of academic positions for palliative care, and as more research projects are realized in basic/applied research and more thesis submitted on the Bachelor, Master and PhD level. More importantly, this development of academic activities in palliative care and end of life care reflects the set goals of the national strategy in palliative care. The research community has especially benefited from national research programs (NRP 67, NRP 74) and from the funding program «Research in Palliative Care» of the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences.

We state that research in palliative care and end of life care covers a broad thematic spectrum – however, in Switzerland we see a clear focus on research related to health care and less in other domains like sociology, psychology, theology, economics, philosophy, etc.

Palliative care and end of life care has an enormous potential to propose innovative future research strategies and competencies. In the face of demographic changes, cost discussions and staff shortages, as well as ethical-moral developments in society, palliative care and end of life care has the potential to shape future research on chronic, long-term care and other fields. Thus, more investment in medical research is needed, but also in interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and translational research.

We argue that public funding and some third-party money from humanitarian funds or charities are currently the only financial resources for research in palliative care and end of life care. There are few opportunities to obtain research funds from marketized institutions, which invest in pharmaceutical or technological research.

Without an effort to further improve and support palliative care and end of life care research in Switzerland, our nation will not be able to compete on an international level with other countries such as the UK, Australia, the US and Belgium. More investment in centres of excellence for palliative care, in the creation of opportunities for scholarships and for building robust national networks across Switzerland are necessary to improve national research structures.

In conclusion, we propose the following steps for the future of palliative care and end of life care research in Switzerland:

1. Dedicate explicit funding for thematic, competitive research programs, to sustain previous development in the field. It is imperative to promote high quality interdisciplinary research.
2. Create a not-for-profit association that develops the palliative care research network in collaboration with different academic centres. This would facilitate the development of multicentre, inter- and transdisciplinary studies.
3. Strengthen activities to effectively integrate palliative care and end of life research in academies, universities, universities of applied sciences and other research organisations. They should promote special interfaculty and interdisciplinary research programs and create new academic positions in this field. Specific support should be

offered by the academic institutions to identify ongoing programs and to develop successful applications.

4. Promote and support multicentre, inter- and transdisciplinary doctoral or PhD- programs on palliative care in Swiss universities, universities of applied sciences and vocational education, including international partnerships and visiting scholarships; specifically support the identification of funding opportunities and application.
5. Collaborate with other institutions, such as the Swiss Health Observatory, to improve provision, accessibility and comparability of data on palliative care and end of life care for national surveys and monitoring.
6. Research, train and educate to improve palliative care practice in Switzerland: Our aim is to provide targeted knowledge with sustainable effects for improving and systematizing palliative care and end of life care in clinical settings, nursing homes, social services, municipalities and at home.
7. Collaborate with stakeholders in primary and specialized care, as well as integrate research results into existing networks such as the primary care network.
8. Establish a national palliative care and end of life care research board, composed of promoters from SNSF, swissuniversities, A+, federal administration and other important stakeholders in collaboration with the network palliative care research switzerland to meet at least once a year for steering, coordinating monitoring and evaluating research activities.

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