OPCARE 9 work package 1 - signs and symptoms of approaching death

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Achieving the best care of the dying should be recognised as a core clinical proficiency and an integral part of end-of-life care – as basic as diagnosis and treatment. Patients in the dying phase should be supported properly, integrating technical expertise with a humanistic and ethical orientation. Therefore, ‘diagnosing dying’ is regarded as a core competence during this process. Current pathways, such as the Liverpool Care Pathway for the Dying Patient (LCP), provide a framework that can support clinicians in identifying the beginning of the dying phase. However, the clinical assessment process of identifying when a patient is dying can be challenging and complex.

Work package 1 of the OPCARE9 project aimed to identify and codify the signs and symptoms that indicate the ‘dying phase’ – the last days or hours before a patient’s death. The work package involved a Delphi method survey, a systematic literature review and a search of the available nonscientific literature. The work package authors found no consistent definition of the dying phase. A research protocol to develop a tool to identify the dying phase will close an important gap in palliative care.

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