

Homeopathy in Palliative Care - An Ethical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

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Palliative care proposes to improve the patient's quality of life who is suffering from life-limiting ailments. Giving emphasis on psychological, physical and spiritual desires and combining Homoeopathy with palliative care requires unique ethical considerations. This is especially true in cases where treatment options in modern medicine are limited. Ethics focuses on autonomy of the patient, informed consent, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. Based on real-world case studies and ethical frameworks, discussion is made in this article how homoeopathic interventions can complement traditional approaches by relieving symptoms, improving emotional well-being and promoting a sense of enablement in patients. But conflicts may arise from the evidence - based medicine that emphasizes the challenges such as giving hope and taking risks. By addressing these ethical principles, this article proposes for a patient-oriented, integrative approach that respects individual preferences while adhering to rigorous ethical standards. Ensuring ethical practices, it emphasizes on open communication, interdisciplinary collaboration and integrations proposing valuable insights for practitioners and policymakers in palliative care.

Keywords: *Ethical practice, Holistic approach, Homoeopathy, Palliative care*

INTRODUCTION

When a patient has a life-threatening illness, palliative care is a strategy that helps them and their loved ones to deal with the situation.¹ Palliative care is an active and crucial component of treatment for patients with terminal illnesses who are not any more responsive to standard healing therapies. Its goal is to make the lives of these patients and their loved ones better by reducing pain and promoting comfort in their bio-psychosocial and spiritual realms.^{2,3}

Various illnesses, including cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory conditions, complications from AIDS, diabetes, kidney failure, chronic liver diseases, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, rheumatoid arthritis, neurological conditions, dementia, congenital abnormalities, etc., necessitate palliative care. An estimated 56.8 million individuals, including 25.7 million in their final year of life, require palliative care annually according to WHO. As populations age and the prevalence of non-communicable

diseases and some communicable diseases rises, there is an increasing need for palliative care on a global scale. In order to help patients and their families, palliative care entails a variety of services provided by a variety of experts, each of whom has equally significant tasks to play.¹

Conventional medicine is undoubtedly remarkably effective at saving lives, but it fails to much for alleviating the mental, emotional, and physical pain caused by life-threatening or terminal illnesses. This need can be fulfilled by an integrative approach to palliative care in healthcare settings, which will provide healing environments for patients, families and their healthcare providers.³ In current scenario the concept of health has been changed from the idea of merely the absence of disease to improving quality of life considering the individual as a whole entity. Therefore, the definition of health includes not only the physical aspect but psychological, social, and spiritual components also in compliance with WHO standards for palliative care.^{1,2}

As far as Homoeopathy is concerned, it is a patient-oriented approach, which brings into line closely with the principles of palliative care. Its gentle and non-invasive approach addresses physical and mental as well as emotional symptoms, offering relief to patients in their most vulnerable as well as critical stages of lives. There are evidences that Homoeopathy has been used

as a complementary and alternative medicine in many palliative care conditions like cancers, cancer-related fatigue,⁴⁻¹² Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis¹³, spinal cord compression¹⁴ and also in severe COVID-19 complications.¹⁵ It has been seen that Homoeopathy is complementary rather than replacing the conventional prescribing and using both approaches together proved to be beneficial in avoiding the increasing drug doses and reducing the side-effects. It is also encouraging to take experience from other disciplines as far as palliative care is concerned.

An attempt has been made in this article to explore the ethical dimensions of using Homoeopathy in palliative care, addressing some key aspects of roles, limitations, responsibilities of homoeopathic practitioners by exploring these issues through an ethical perspective providing insights into how Homoeopathy can be responsibly and effectively integrated into the broader framework of palliative care.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The lack of high-quality evidence is caused by a number of ethical issues, including practical difficulties when doing research with vulnerable patients and their families, barriers in getting informed consent and methodological difficulties in the palliative care field.^{16,17} But still, a thoughtful construction of well-designed research

protocol considering the ethical situations, may overcome the problems related to the research involving the patients under palliative care. However, the integration of Homoeopathy into palliative care raises important ethical considerations, particularly in areas such as patient autonomy, process of informed consent, safety, equity, and the need for evidence-based practice.¹⁸

The following ethical principles are of concern in homoeopathic perspective during the palliative care:

1. Respect for Patient Autonomy

In a palliative care setting, patients often seek treatments that align with their personal values, beliefs, and preferences. Homoeopathy offers a gentle, individualized approach, which can help to patients who prefer non-invasive therapies. In this regard, a clear communication about the scope and limitations of Homoeopathy is essential with the patient as well as with the family members, ensuring the understanding its role as complementary to conventional palliative care.¹⁸

2. Non-maleficence (Do No Harm)

Homoeopathic medicines are well known for their safety profile, as they are highly potentized and diluted medicinal substances. Homoeopathy should complement the conventional palliative care. Homoeopathic practitioners must

collaborate with multidisciplinary teams to ensure holistic yet safe patient care.¹⁸

3. Beneficence (Promoting Well-being)

Since Homoeopathy is a science of gentle treatment, it may help patients feel more comfortable overall by reducing symptoms like pain, anxiety, nausea, and insomnia. Because of the individualized nature of Homoeopathy, it aligns with the patient-oriented palliative care principles. Documenting and respecting patients' experiences with Homoeopathy while acknowledging its limitations promotes the ethical practice.¹⁸

4. Justice and Equity

Justice and equity in the health care system can be applied to Homoeopathy by ensuring access to quality care, education and promoting the use of Homoeopathy as it is affordable, cost-effective and suitable for all which provides healthcare at the doorstep of the population through various community health programmes and outreach activities. While accessing to palliative care, Homoeopathy varies significantly across socio-economic groups. Introducing Homoeopathy in palliative care could widen the gaps if it is not universally available or covered by healthcare systems. Advocacy for policy changes and integration of Homoeopathy into public healthcare systems can ensure that patients have access to Homoeopathy

as a part of an integrated healthcare system, offering more options for treatment and also benefit for the communities where there is limited access to conventional medicine.¹⁸

5. Truthfulness and Transparency

Practitioners must be transparent about the evidences supporting Homoeopathy. By exaggerating or overstating its benefits, there are possibilities of losing trust, while underrepresenting its potential could disagree patients an opportunity of relief. It requires continuous professional development and ethical communication practices on the part of the homoeopathic practitioners.¹⁸

6. Informed consent process

Informed consent is one of the main rights and the core as well as protection of any participation in the clinical trials. But informed consent is very difficult to get in cases of vulnerable patients undergoing palliative care treatment. Hence, it may be necessary to explore legal and ethical principles that would support such criteria of getting informed consent. In palliative care research trials, there are various ethically sound consent methods to ensure the protection and non-exploitation of those who participate. These include (1) consent at the time of entry into the research study; (2) prior to the study; (3) postponed until after the study has started; (4) given by a

legal representative; and (5) waived consent. It should always incorporate the opinions and consent of the patients' relatives as well. When less conventional methods like early consent or proxy methods of obtaining informed consent are used it may increase the participation.¹⁹

7. Holistic Considerations

In view of Homoeopathy, a person is more than just a collection of different body organs and the body, mind, and emotions are all fully integrated in terms of health, illness, and treatment rather than existing independently and separately. According to homoeopathic philosophy, even though an organ may appear to be ill, the individual as a whole is actually ill.

In Homoeopathy the therapeutic tool is available only through Homoeopathic Materia Medica. Beyond treating illness, Homoeopathy promotes overall well-being and aims to strengthen the body's resistance to disease. By focusing on the holistic nature of health, Homoeopathy improves the symptoms along with promoting balance and harmony in the individual. This approach aligns with the belief that true healing encompasses all dimensions of life.^{20,21} So, Homoeopathy offers holistic approach of palliative care, addressing not just physical symptoms but also emotional and spiritual well-being, what is now the concept of health according to WHO. The

therapeutic relationship itself often provides comfort and reassurance. The potential ethical pitfalls may be avoided by emphasizing realistic goals and supporting patients' overall care during a palliative care.

CONCLUSION

Palliative care should involve a collective approach in order to assist patients and their caregivers live as actively as possible until death. In this context, it is to emphasize that homoeopathic system of medicine based on the principle of individualized treatment has gained interest for its potential to complement conventional palliative care. The integration of Homoeopathy in palliative care requires a careful balance of ethical principles, clinical judgment, and patient-oriented care. Homoeopathic practitioners can support an effective and comprehensive approach that upholds patients' dignity by addressing these ethical issues. This will extend survival times, strengthen patients' immune systems and improve their quality of life in the terminal phases. Therefore, it is imperative that the health care systems be integrated, including Homoeopathy in order to give the patients in need the necessary palliative treatment.

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