

HealthPathways for palliative care symptom control

A local initiative of COORDINARE – South Eastern NSW PHN, Southern NSW Local Health District, Capital Health Network – ACT PHN and ACT Health

July 2023

END OF LIFE AND PALLIATIVE CARE NETWORK

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aci.health.nsw.gov.au

Agency for Clinical Innovation

1 Reserve Road St Leonards NSW 2065

Locked Bag 2030, St Leonards NSW 1590

Phone: +61 2 9464 4666 | Email: aci-info@health.nsw.gov.au | Web: aci.health.nsw.gov.au

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Palliative and end of life care delivery in southern NSW

Introduction

Palliative and end of life care in the southern NSW region is delivered across various health settings, such as:

- general practice
- residential aged care facilities
- community settings
- regional hospitals.

Specialist palliative care nursing teams provide assessment, care and consultative support for people living in the community. These teams work in collaboration with general practitioners (GPs), residential aged care staff and other providers. The teams are accessible via community health intake services in five regional centres: Goulburn, Queanbeyan, Eurobodalla, Cooma and Bega Valley. Palliative care specialist nurses also support inpatient palliative care in some regional hospitals. A range of specialist medical services and/or support models are in place across the region.

HealthPathways

HealthPathways is a free, online portal that supports healthcare professionals in assessing, managing and making referral decisions for medical conditions. HealthPathways is 'localised' by GPs who develop pathways to meet local needs that are specific to the region they cover. HealthPathways is dynamic and allows users to provide feedback about the site content. This enables the team to continually update and review content as feedback is provided.

HealthPathways is implemented throughout Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom in more than 40 locations.

ACT and Southern NSW HealthPathways

The ACT and Southern NSW (SNSW) HealthPathways is a collaborative project between the Southern NSW Local Health District, Capital Health Network – ACT PHN, ACT Health and COORDINARE – South Eastern NSW PHN. Each of these agencies is considered a program partner for funding, planning and delivery. This HealthPathways site covers the southern region of NSW, from Batemans Bay to the Victorian border and the Snowy Mountains region, including Cooma, Jindabyne, Queanbeyan, Goulburn and Crookwell, as well as the ACT. The program is a joint project with the ACT given that most tertiary referral pathways for southern NSW lead into the ACT.

Purpose

ACT and SNSW HealthPathways aims to enable healthcare professionals access information about:

- different services available within the southern NSW and ACT regions
- when to refer patients to which service and at what time.

In 2015, based on GP feedback, a suite of 14 new palliative care pathways were localised in consultation with specialists from Canberra Hospital and Calvary Public Hospital's Community Specialist Palliative Care Service (operating from Clare Holland House) in the ACT.

How does it work

The ACT and Southern NSW HealthPathways captures the most common elements of palliative care that a GP may encounter in deciding whether a patient needs initial palliative support or they are nearing end of life. The pathways cover topics such as new palliative care patients, managing palliative care emergencies, pain management and symptom control.

The ACT and Southern NSW HealthPathways site has over 620 clinical and referral pages, including 31 palliative care referral and clinical pages and 14 pathways specifically covering common symptoms encountered in the management of a person in palliative care.

Pathways are written in a style that allows the user to either read the pathway from beginning to end or jump into sections that may be relevant to their patient. All clinical pathways are clearly written and consistently follow the format of Assessment, Management and Referral.

In 2019, the pathways site transitioned to a 'mobile-friendly' platform to allow users to access the site from any device including desktop, laptop, tablet or mobile phone. This transition, as well as providing improved functionality, recognised that patient care can occur not only at a desk in a general practice but also in a patient's home or aged care facility, if needed.

In the same year, the palliative care pages were reviewed in consultation with the palliative care specialists at Clare Holland House in the ACT, with support from the ACT and Southern NSW GP clinical editing team. This review also saw consultation with the Southern NSW Local Health District Palliative Care Manager to ensure that patients diagnosed with a life-limiting condition were referred early and to the most appropriate service.

Benefits of the service

The ACT and Southern NSW HealthPathways can support best practice palliative care as follows:

- Patients with unmet end of life or palliative care needs are identified earlier
- Enhanced involvement of GPs in end-of-life discussions with patients, families and carers
- Improved and standardised management of end of life symptoms, including appropriate medications

- Improved conversations for planning end of life, including place of care, death and after-hours support options
- Access to and use of pathways by clinicians to support their decision making anywhere anytime.

All clinical pathways include links to relevant resources, including websites for both healthcare professionals and patients. These include culturally and linguistically diverse as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources where they exist and are appropriate. Users can provide these resources directly to their patient during a consult.

Page views of the palliative care pathways on the ACT and Southern NSW HealthPathways site more than doubled (1656 to 4153 views) in the 2019-2021 period from the previous three years.

What tips do you have for others?

- Identify GP champions who are actively engaged in supporting high-quality palliative and end of life care.
- Develop a strong sense of community in local areas supporting personalised and tailored patient-centred care – a collaborative and agile clinician base to develop services that meet the needs of the community within available resources.
- Build strong engagement and relationships with palliative care specialists. Their support in reviewing HealthPathways provides confidence to users that they match local procedures and guidelines as well as providing a resource tool for reference when supporting GPs in managing their patients.

Since the review of palliative care pathway suite was finalised in 2021, there has been a much greater focus on palliative care from both a state and federal level to further support integrated palliative care services.

Under the Greater Choice for at Home Palliative Care measure, a range of activities are being implemented to improve awareness of local palliative and end of life care options and facilitate access to palliative care services closer to home. This will include a review of the current suite of palliative and end of life care pathways.

ACT & SNSW HealthPathways will aim to address all key action areas that form the Clinical Principles for End of Life and Palliative Care Guidelines as part of the next review cycle

Supporting documents

[Considerations for a palliative and end-of-life model of care for Southern NSW](#) (December 2017), COORDINARE, South Eastern NSW PHN

Acknowledgements

Bianca Coffey, Health Pathways Project Coordinator, COORDINARE – South Eastern NSW PHN,
Email: bcoffey@coordinare.org.au

Jacky Clancy, Palliative Care Program Manager, Southern NSW Local Health District, Email:
jacqueline.clancy@health.nsw.gov.au

Dr Sivaraj Rajadorai, Dr Lea Currie and Dr Suharsha Kanathigoda, Specialist Palliative Care
Service, Calvary Health Care, ACT

Appendix

Alignment with the Clinical Principles for End of Life and Palliative Care Guideline

Key Action area		Evidence
1. Screening and identification	✓	<p>Patients with unmet end of life or palliative care needs are identified earlier.</p> <p>Supportive and Palliative Care Indicators Tool (SPICt) included in referral pathways to assist GPs in identifying patients who may require further assessment for support and palliative care needs.</p>
2. Triage		
3. Comprehensive Assessment		
4. Care Planning	✓	<p>Enhanced involvement of GPs in end of life discussions with patients, families and carers.</p> <p>All clinical pathways include links to relevant resources including websites for both healthcare professionals and patients. These include culturally and linguistically diverse as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources where they exist and are appropriate. Users have the ability to provide these resources directly to their patient during a consult.</p>
5. Open and Respectful Communication		
6. Symptom Management	✓	<p>There are 14 pathways that include the most common symptoms encountered when managing a palliative patient, ranging from newly diagnosed to those at the very end stage of life. The pathways cover topics such as new palliative care patient, managing palliative care emergencies, pain management and symptom control.</p>
7. 24/7 Access to Support	✓	<p>Improved conversations for planning end of life, including after-hours support options.</p>
8. Place of Death	✓	<p>Improved conversations for planning end of life, including place of death.</p>
9. Grief and Bereavement Support	✓	<p>A Bereavement, Grief and Loss pathway is currently in development.</p>