



AIIHPC

Palliative Care Research Network

Ulster University



OUR PCRN MEMBERS

- Dr Felicity Hasson, Senior Lecturer, School of Nursing
- Professor George Kernohan, Professor of Health Research, School of Nursing
- Professor Gerry Leavey, Director of the Bamford Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing, School of Psychology
- Professor Sonja McIlpatrick, Head of School and Professor of Nursing and Palliative Care, School of Nursing, Ulster University

OUR RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:

We have funded projects to support a range of palliative care research at Ulster University

- Developing Public Health approaches: public awareness of palliative care and advance care planning;
- Education for health care professionals to help them manage constipation in hospice settings (**DEMCoN**);
- the Healthcare Assistant's role in out of hours community palliative care provided by hospice organisations.
- Addressing agitation, advanced dementia and other mental health issues within palliative care

THE BENEFITS OF AIIHPC PCRN MEMBERSHIP

Like all Network members, the PCRN keeps us informed about opportunities and developments in palliative care research, policy and practice at home and abroad. The PCRN is a community of health professionals with a shared purpose to develop our palliative care research. Our individual efforts can be shared for better impact. Some joint working has also been achieved, as joint investigators: With Assoc Prof Suzanne Guerin (UCD) we have developed a new framework for knowledge transfer in palliative care: the "EMTReK model" which emphasises a structured and timely approach to research dissemination for maximum impact. With Drs Suzanne Timmons and Siobhan Fox (UCC), we have completed guideline development work for people with Parkinson's Disease and now link closely with them on a project to develop a new model for dementia care.

A caring approach to a sensitive issue

Sonja McIlpatrick, Head of School and Professor of Nursing and Palliative Care at Ulster University, talks to VIEW editor Brian Pelan about a Marie Curie funded study which looked at the problem of constipation in people with terminal illnesses



The Ulster University has undertaken a research project called DEMCoN to help improve care, for those living with a terminal illness, to help them deal with constipation.

DEMCoN stands for 'Development of an educational intervention into the management of constipation'.

The university, which was granted £170,000 of funding from Marie Curie, conducted research in three of the charity's hospices in Belfast, Edinburgh and Solihull.

Patients with a terminal illness can often suffer from frequent constipation. The research aimed to develop a pilot educational scheme to be tested by Marie Curie nurses, medics and pharmacists.

If successful, the charity may consider extending the scheme to hospices across the UK.

Ulster University Professor Sonja McIlpatrick said: "Despite best practice guidelines and international advice it is still not clear that healthcare professionals have enough awareness of the problem and there are variations of how constipation is assessed, diagnosed and managed in palliative care settings."

"Ulster University's research will be crucial in helping to educate healthcare professionals to overcome these barriers and ultimately provide good quality care for patients and their families."

The research project was comprised of four stages.

The first phase looked at the literature and the guidelines for the treatment of constipation.

Interviews were carried out in the second phase with healthcare professionals and patients.

The third phase of the study involved the use of an educational intervention with nurses, medics and pharmacists. The final phase sought to evaluate the usability and acceptability of the intervention from the perspective of healthcare assistants and patients in a hospice setting.

"A lot of the constipation is caused by the drugs that the patients are on," said Prof McIlpatrick.

"The challenge is that whenever you are managing the care of someone who is nearing the end of their life, there are so many symptoms that you are treating.

"Someone will have pain or someone will have nausea. When we look at the evidence we find that constipation comes further down the list. And yet it impacts on all the other symptoms.

"Because people are on morphine or other painkillers they can get constipation.

"The question is how are we managing the treatment of constipation?"

"It's a very sensitive issue and in everyday life it's not something that we talk about," added Prof McIlpatrick.

"The rates of constipation in the terminally ill are still quite high.

"And it has a real impact from the patient's perspective.

"Our research project was aimed at educating health care professionals about the issue of constipation.

"We also wanted to look at questions of toilet habits, privacy, dignity, and diet.

"We're not taking away the pharmacological management of constipation because there are drugs that really work, but in the overall picture we also wanted to look at the non-pharmacological management of constipation for patients with terminal conditions."

Research project: Professor Sonja McIlpatrick

AT ULSTER, WE ARE KEEN TO COLLABORATE!

We would like to connect with researchers at any stage in their career who might consider undertaking research into any aspect of palliative care or a specific life-limiting condition mentioned here.

We currently have postgraduate students working on:

- perceptions of young people towards palliative care: a public health approach
- advance care planning conversations for children requiring palliative care using Experience-Based Co-design
- the role and experience of the healthcare staff in delivering palliative care in community settings;
- Supporting palliative care globally:
 - caregivers of patients with end stage cancer in Ghana.
 - palliative care education in Japanese long-term care facilities

<http://viewdigital.org/2019/09/02/latest-issue-of-view-insight-into-palliative-care/>

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