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Volunteers in palliative care in nursing homes – providing quality of life for residents.

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Abstract EAPC, Berlin 2019.

Titel: Volunteers in palliative care in nursing homes – providing quality of life for residents.

Karen Sangild Stølen, Mette Raunkiær, Jesper Frederiksen and Michael Hviid Jacobsen

Background and aims

Volunteers work in palliative care among seriously ill or dying people in nursing homes. Studies and practice indicate that the volunteers attend to tasks and offer services for the nursing home residents and their families that extend beyond or supplement palliative care provided by professionals. The aim of this study is to describe the volunteer activities in a nursing home and how these activities contribute to quality of life for nursing home residents with palliative needs and their families. The study is part of a PhD thesis.

Methods

A qualitative design was used: participation observations of the volunteers when they had tasks in the nursing home, supplemented with individual interviews with volunteers, residents, relatives and professionals. Three different nursing homes, with 70-80 volunteers engaged, were included and 80 hours of participant observations were completed. 11 individual follow up interviews took place: 5 volunteers, 2 residents, 2 relatives and 2 professionals. A thematic content analysis was used.

Results

The volunteers established and provided social fellowships related to for example music, culture, food, nature experiences and physical movement. The activities seemed to contribute to the quality of life for the residents. The activities offered something different from what the professional palliative care could offer, but was limited to those who could come to the common room in the nursing home. The voluntary commitment depended on management and cooperation and recognition from professionals and other volunteers was essential.

Conclusions

The findings showed that volunteer activities are characterized by great diversity and contribute to quality of life for the resident and supplement the palliative care in nursing homes. The activities benefit the resident most when the resident is still mobile. Volunteering demands management, cooperation and recognition. Provisions for the families was unclear.