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Title: End-of-life care communication in chronic obstructive pulmonary disease: A survey applied to Portuguese respirologists

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Body: Background: Palliative and end and-of-life (EoL) care is a major component in the management of all patients with advanced chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Patient-physician communication is essential to assure adequate EoL care. Aim: To evaluate the practice of Portuguese respirologists in the fields of EoL discussion and palliative care, and identify it's barriers. Methods: A self-administered on-line survey was sent to all specialists in respiratory medicine affiliated to Portuguese Respiratory Society. Of 464 eligible participants, 136 returned a completed questionnaire (29,3%). Results: Most physicians reported to have rarely introduced EoL discussions with their patients (48,5%). Most of them had never (28,7%) or rarely (39,7%) suggested patients to decide about the use of invasive mechanical ventilation. Discussions were described to occur mostly during or after a major exacerbation (53,7%). The majority indicated they treat dyspnea with opioids occasionally (32,4%) or frequently (30,1%). Only 9,6% stated to never/rarely treat anxiety and depression. Most participants described the discussion of EoL issues as being difficult (69,1%) or very difficult (19,9%). The reasons most often pointed were to feel that patients were not prepared to discuss this matters (70%), fear of taking away patient's hope (58%) and lack of training in this area (51%). No correlation was found between years and type of practice or number of COPD patients treated per year and the main outcomes. Conclusion: In our reality EoL communication is still insufficient. Training in this area as been identified as an aspect for improvement, and should therefore be encouraged.