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Title: Co-morbidity and use of medicines during the terminal stage of life in patients with COPD

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Body: Background Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is one of the most common diseases with substantial morbidity and mortality. In Sweden, approximately 3000 individuals die every year as a consequence of COPD. Aim To describe, in patients with COPD, co-morbidity during the two last years in life. The aim was also to explore the use of medicines during the terminal stage of life. Method Data from medical records of all patients who had COPD as underlying cause of death in 2003 and 2004 were studied retrospectively in one urban and one rural area, covering 19% of the Swedish population. A questionnaire was developed for collection of information. Results A total number of 822 patients died due to COPD as the underlying cause of death in selected areas. In total, 712 patients were diagnosed as having at least one co-morbid disease during the two last years in life. Respiratory failure was the most common diagnosis (33%), followed by pneumonia (26%), heart failure (26%), disorders of urinary system (13%), and depression/psychiatric diseases (13%). In total, 440 patients were admitted to hospital due to co-morbid diseases, with cardiovascular diseases accounting for 25% of the admissions. The most prescribed COPD-drugs during the last two years were inhaled anticholinergics (75%) and inhaled short-acting β -agonists (72%). Medicines due to co-morbid diseases were commonly used, mainly diuretics (82%) and psychopharmacological drugs (68%). Conclusions Co-morbidity was common during the two last years in life for patients with COPD. The use of medicines for COPD and other diseases was high and, apart for COPD medication, medicines for cardiovascular and psychiatric diseases were the most common.