

A New Way of Learning End-of-Life Care and Providing Public Palliative Care Education in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic – Online Last Aid Courses

Georg Bollig^{1,2,3,4}, Boris Knopf⁴, Stefan Meyer⁴, Marina Schmidt⁴

¹Medical Research Unit, Institute of Regional Health Research, University of Southern Denmark, 6200 Aabenraa, Denmark

² Palliative Care Team, Medical Department Sønderborg/Tønder, South Jutland Hospital, 6400 Sønderborg, Denmark

³Last Aid Research Group Europe (LARGE)

⁴Letzte Hilfe Deutschland gUG, Schleswig, Germany.

***Corresponding Author:** Georg Bollig, Medical Research Unit, Institute of Regional Health Research, University of Southern Denmark, 6200 Aabenraa, Denmark.

Opinion Article

Care for seriously ill and dying people at home is a public health issue and should according to Kellehear be everyone's business (1,2). In the future we do need a cooperation of citizens and professionals in order to provide palliative care at home for all in need (1-5). The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that end-of-life care is especially challenging in times of a pandemic with limited healthcare resources and the need for isolation measures. We have been told a number of stories of people who did not receive adequate palliative care or relatives who were not able to say farewell to dying people due to isolation measures. In nursing homes isolation and lack of contact to relatives and others may lead to psychological, social and existential suffering.

Last Aid courses for citizens have been started in 2015 in Norway, Germany and Denmark in order to raise awareness about death and dying, to encourage the public debate and to improve the citizens knowledge about palliative care (4). The so-called public knowledge approach as described by Bollig seeks to make knowledge about palliative care and end-of-life care part of public knowledge of all

citizens (3). The aim of Last Aid courses is to provide public palliative care education (PPCE) for citizens in order to enable them to participate in end-of-life care provision at home (3-5). At present Last Aid courses have already been established or are being introduced in 16 countries in Europe and Australia. An International Last Aid working group is responsible for the content and adaptation of the curriculum and slide-presentation of the Last Aid course (5,6). The standardized Last Aid course for citizens is usually taught by two certified instructors with experience from the field of palliative care during one afternoon or evening within a timeframe of 3,5 hours. The Last Aid course covers the most important themes connected to end-of-life care within the following modules each lasting 45 minutes: 1. Dying as a normal part of life; 2. Planning ahead; 3. Relieving suffering; 4. Final goodbyes. The topics of the Last Aid course include end-of-life care, advance care planning and decision-making, symptom management, burial and cultural aspects of death and bereavement. Normally the Last Aid course has up to 20 participants and two instructors meeting in a classroom or other convenient location that is suitable for a

A New Way of Learning End-of-Life Care and Providing Public Palliative Care Education in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic – Online Last Aid Courses

group meeting. Our experiences with the Last Aid course show that people like to talk about death and dying and that they appreciate to learn the basics of palliative care provision within the short Last Aid course with the duration of four teaching lessons only (4,5). A recent pilot study has shown that special Last Aid courses for children and teenagers are very much appreciated by the participants and that the majority of children and teenagers do want to talk about death and dying in an open and secure surrounding (16).

After the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions for group meetings in Germany it was obvious that we had to explore other ways to provide PPCE by Last Aid courses. A working group Last Aid online was formed with participation of 34 experienced German Last Aid course instructors from Letzte Hilfe Deutschland gUG. This working group discussed challenges and options for an online Last Aid course for citizens. Two certified Last Aid course instructors held thereafter online Last Aid courses using different types of software and meetings platforms with a maximum number of 18 participants. The first experiences were evaluated using an online group meeting in addition to a short questionnaire for the Last aid Course participants. A scientific evaluation of the first experience is ongoing. Nevertheless the first experiences with both Last Aid courses for citizens and the training of Last course instructors using online-meetings are very encouraging. The first experiences suggest that Last Aid and palliative care education is feasible and worth doing using an online

approach. Hopefully online Last Aid courses will help to provide a basis for palliative care education for the public and may contribute to preparing citizens for end-of-life situations and participating in palliative care at home. The effects and the importance of online education in public palliative care education need further investigation and research.

References

- [1] Kellehear A. *Compassionate Cities. Public health and end-of-life care.* Routledge, Oxfordshire 2005
- [2] Kellehear A. *Compassionate communities: end-of-life care as everyone's responsibility.* *Q J Med* 2013;106: 1071-1075
- [3] Bollig G. *Palliative Care für alte und demente Menschen lernen und lehren.* LIT-Verlag, Berlin 2010. <http://www.lit-verlag.de/isbn/3-643-90058-6>
- [4] Bollig G, Kuklau N. *Der Letzte Hilfe Kurs - ein Angebot zur Verbesserung der allgemeinen ambulanten Palliativversorgung durch Information und Befähigung von Bürgerinnen und Bürgern.* *Z Palliativmed* 2015; 16: 210-216.
- [5] Bollig G, Brandt F, Ciurlionis M, Knopf B. *Last Aid Course. An Education For All Citizens and an Ingredient of Compassionate Communities.* *Healthcare (Basel).* 2019 Jan 28;7(1). pii: E19. doi: 10.3390/healthcare7010019.
- [6] www.lastaid.info
- [7] Bollig G, Pothmann R, Mainzer K, Fiedler H. *Children and Teenagers Want to Talk About death and Dying – Experiences from Pilot-Courses Last Aid for Kids/Teens from 8-16 Years.* *Z Palliativmed* 2020; 21: 253-259.

Citation: Georg Bollig et. al, (2020), "A New Way of Learning End-of-Life Care and Providing Public Palliative Care Education in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic – Online Last Aid Courses", *Arch Health Sci*; 4(1): 1-2.

DOI: 10.31829/2641-7456/ahs2020-4(1)-123

Copyright: © 2020 Georg Bollig et. al. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are