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# Are There Differences in the Prevalence of Palliative Care-Related Problems in People Living With Advanced Cancer and Eight Non-Cancer Conditions? A Systematic Review

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## Introduction

- ❖ If access to effective palliative care is to extend beyond cancer patients, an understanding of the comparative prevalence of palliative care problems among cancer and non-cancer patients is necessary.
- ❖ **Objectives:** to describe and compare the prevalence of 17 palliative care-related problems (e.g. pain, anxiety, spiritual pain, psychosocial distress) across the 4 palliative care domains among adults with advanced cancer, acquired immune deficiency syndrome, chronic heart failure, end-stage renal disease (ESRD), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), motor neuron disease (MND), Parkinson's disease, and dementia.

## Methods

- ❖ **Study design:** a systematic literature review in line with the PRISMA 2009 checklist, the PRISMA Flow Diagram, and the Center for Reviews and Dissemination procedures.
- ❖ **Search strategy:** restricted by pre set inclusion and exclusion criteria: 3 electronic medical databases, namely Medline (1966 to February 2013), Embase (1988 to February 2013), and PsycINFO (1985 to February 2013), were searched using three groups of keywords. Within each group of keywords, the words were combined using OR. The three groups of keywords were then combined using AND. Keywords were derived from those that were successfully used in already published symptom prevalence systematic reviews. The reference lists within the full texts were also searched.
- ❖ **Data analysis:** the prevalence figures of all included studies were summarized using minimum and maximum percentage ranges, and the number of studies that showed the prevalence of a problem in a particular diagnostic group of 50% or more was presented.

## Results

- ❖ The electronic searches yielded 4697 hits after the removal of 1784 duplicates. Of these hits, **143** met the review criteria.
- ❖ The greatest number of studies were found for advanced cancer (n = 57) and ESRD patients (n = 47), and 75 of the 143 studies used validated scales. Few data were available for people living with MS (n = 2) and MND (n = 3).
- ❖ The problems with a prevalence of 50% or more found across most of the 9 studied diagnostic groups were: pain, fatigue, anorexia, dyspnea, and worry.

## Conclusion

- ❖ There are commonalities in the prevalence of problems across cancer and non-cancer patients, highlighting the need for palliative care to be provided irrespective of diagnosis.
- ❖ The methodological heterogeneity across the studies and the lack of non-cancer studies need to be addressed in future research.

The results of this study are published in the *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*: free open access article:

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