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Referral pattern at a young palliative care unit in southwest, Nigeria

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Background: Studies have shown that palliative care referral is not done as often and as early as required. In order to identify the potential barriers to appropriate referrals and awareness of palliative care service in a young growing unit. The current referral pattern would need to be audited for efficient palliative care services.

Method: A retrospective cross-sectional study was carried out reviewing all the in-patients from the medical information's department and palliative care unit records. The data was collected from the June 1st 2016 to October 30th 2018. Data was entered using the SPSS statistical package version 20 (Chicago IL).

Result: There were a total of 10,186 in-patient admissions during the 29 months review period. The number of patients diagnosed as having different forms of cancer were 309, out of which only forty two (42; 13.6%) cancer patients were referred to be seen by the palliative care unit of the hospital. General surgeons referred the most; 21(50%), then gynecologist 14(33.3%), Internal medicine 3(7.1%), hematology 2(4.8%), while orthopedics and pediatric referrals were 1(2.4%) each. It should be noted that 100% of cases referred were cancer patients.

Conclusion: In view of the referral pattern documented in our facility, most clinicians benefit from education on who needs palliative care how early such patient should be referred to palliative care specialist for better quality of life.

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