

LETTERS

END OF LIFE CARE

Palliative medicine must accept responsibility for end of life care

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Stephenson highlights the vacuum of care that has developed in many parts of the country since publication of the independent review of the Liverpool care pathway.¹⁻³ He states that the “buck stops” with doctors, but many would contend that end of life care should be the responsibility of all healthcare professionals.

If anything, the buck should stop with our specialty—palliative medicine/care. We facilitated the widespread introduction of the pathway (despite lack of evidence) and failed to provide the necessary training and support for many of our non-specialist hospital colleagues. Moreover, we buried our heads in the sand when the national press first raised concerns about the pathway in 2009.

The specialty is working with others to develop an alternative. However, for the alternative to be credible, it must be evidence based. Such an undertaking cannot be done within the timescales mentioned in the independent review—6-12 months. Hence, we urgently need to come up with an alternative solution (to prevent even more patients experiencing a “bad” death in hospital).

We have previously described our “solution,”⁴ in which all patients on the pathway are referred to or reviewed by the

palliative care team. Our model of care provides support for healthcare professionals, reassurance for patients and carers, and (based on data from a service evaluation) more timely management of pain and other symptoms. Our model of care, or a version thereof, could be immediately rolled out in most UK hospitals.

It is time for palliative medicine/care to accept this “buck” because no one else will do so (and no one else is better qualified to do so).

Competing interests: None declared.

- 1 Stephenson JB. End of life care—the buck stops here. *BMJ* 2013;347:f6608. (12 November.)
- 2 Duffin C. Liverpool care pathway: dying to know what will happen next. *Nurs Stand* 2013;28:14-5.
- 3 Department of Health. More care, less pathway: a review of the Liverpool care pathway. 2013. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/212450/Liverpool_Care_Pathway.pdf.
- 4 Davies AN, Thompson J. The Liverpool care pathway for the dying patient: throwing the baby out with the bath water? [electronic response to Chinthapalli K. The birth and death of the Liverpool care pathway]. *BMJ* 2013. www.bmj.com/content/347/bmj.f4669/rr/658175.

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