The impact of advance care planning of place of death, a hospice retrospective cohort study

Julian Abel,1 Andy Pring,2 Alison Rich,1 Tariq Malik,2 Julia Verne2

1Weston Area Health Trust and Weston Hospicecare, Weston super Mare, UK
2South West Public Health Observatory, Bristol, UK

Correspondence to
Dr Julian Abel, Consultant in Palliative Care, Weston Area Health Trust, Grange Rd, Weston super Mare, BS23 4TQ, UK; julian.abel@mhs.net/abelju@yahoo.co.uk

Received 12 July 2012
Revised 29 January 2013
Accepted 8 February 2013
Published Online First 14 March 2013

ABSTRACT

Objectives There is limited evidence of the impact of advance care planning (ACP) on outcomes. We conducted a retrospective cohort study on deaths of all patients known to a hospice in a 2.5-year period to see if use of ACP affected actual place of death, hospital use and cost of hospital care in the last year.

Results 969 patients were included. 550 (57%) people completed ACP. 414 (75%) achieved their choice of place of death. For those who chose home, 34 (11.3%) died in hospital; a care home 2 (1.7%) died in hospital; a hospice 14 (11.2%) died in hospital and 6 (86%) who chose to die in hospital did so. 112 (26.5%) of people without ACP died in hospital. Mean number of days in hospital in the last year of life was 18.1 in the ACP group and 26.5 in the non-ACP group (p<0.001). Mean cost of hospital treatment during the last year of life for those who died in hospital was £11,299, those dying outside of hospital £7,730 (p<0.001). Mean number of emergency admissions for those who died in hospital was 2.2 and who died elsewhere was 1.7 (p<0.001).

Conclusions ACP can be used routinely in a hospice setting. Those who used ACP spent less time in hospital in their last year. ACP is associated with a reduction in the number of days in hospital in the last year of life with less hospital costs, supporting the assumptions made in the End of Life Care Strategy 2008.

METHODS

The hospice has a catchment area of about 150 000 and is a mixture of rural
countryside and towns. Approximately 700 patients are referred for specialist palliative care each year, which includes inpatient and outpatient services, visits from specialist palliative care community nurses at home and a day care centre. For the last 4 years, the hospice has been using a single document for ACP, ‘Planning Ahead’, which combines a modified version of the Preferred Priorities For Care document with a Putting Affairs In Order guide and an Advance Decision To Refuse Treatment document. ‘The Planning Ahead’ document was developed in response to requests from patients and their families to have a unified document for future care. It is part of the hospice assessment paperwork and is given out to patients and families at an appropriate time. Hospice practice has involved emphasising the use of ACP and ‘Planning Ahead’ has been accepted as the single unifying document across the local health community. The hospice uses an electronic patient record (EPR) for all clinical information, including recording the outcome of ACP discussions and actual place of death. All the statistics were calculated using Stata 10.1 (Stata Corp 2009) using t tests (two-sided) to compare means. Logistic regression was done with the Logistic command in the Stata statistics package.

**Study design**

We conducted a retrospective observational cohort study of all patients who were known to the hospice who died between 01 January 2009 and 30 June 2011. All the patients had a life limiting disease and were referred to the hospice for specialist palliative care. The hospice uses an EPR for all clinical notes. Patient preferred place of death, actual place of death and reason for variance are recorded routinely. Use of ACP was defined by data entry in these fields. Although ACP is more complex than this, for the purpose of analysis, we used presence or absence of preferred place of death as a marker of whether ACP discussions had taken place. The hospice community nurses remain in contact with the patient up until death and then with the carers into bereavement. In addition, the hospice nurses inform the hospital team of any admission to hospital of a hospice patient. Likewise, deaths and discharges are passed on to the community by the hospital palliative care team. Each death is discussed at our multidisciplinary meeting, so presence or absence of ACP expressed at any time is reviewed. In addition, each relative receives a contact from our specialist palliative care community nurses to review both death and bereavement. We are therefore confident that, for the cohort of patients in this study, we were able to say whether ACP had taken place or not. Place of death was defined as being in the patient’s home, in a care home (either nursing or residential), in the hospice or in hospital (acute general hospital or community hospital). Absence of ACP was defined as the patient not having expressed a preferred place of death. Reason for variance was a free text entry. The Secondary User Services database was used to match patient identifying information to find the number of days in hospital each patient spent in the last year of life. This included both day case and inpatient stays. Day case hospital stays were included as chemotherapy is often given on the oncology day unit. The cost figures were actual costs adjusted for length of stay and complexity of care, as per national agreement.

All patient data used in this study were handled and processed in accordance with National Health Service (NHS) best practice and Caldicott recommendations. Although the Data Protection Act does not specifically apply to deceased patient records, any common law duty was adhered to.

**RESULTS**

Descriptive characteristics for the cohort are shown in Table 1. The initial cohort included 971 deaths. Two
were excluded as no actual place of death was recorded. When doing the analyses looking at the impact of ACP on place of death, 969 cases were used. To look at the impact of ACP on number of days in hospital and number of hospital admissions we had a truncated dataset. The following patients were excluded:

- 217: Non-residents who lived outside of Primary Care Trust catchment area (because admission data were not available)
- 85: Missing NHS number (link to hospital admissions not possible)
- 9: Recorded NHS number inconsistent with Cancer Register (SWPfHo) and/or Primary Care Mortality Database (ONS)—(unsafe match with hospital admission data)
- 2: Missing place of death.

The total exclusions were 313 leaving 656 for analysis.

MAIN RESULTS

There were 501 male subjects, average age 75.4, and 468 female subjects, average age 74.6. The mean age was 75 (range 27–105) years at date of death. A total of 839 (87%) patients had a cancer diagnosis and 130 (13%) a non-cancer diagnosis. Of the 969 patients, 309 (32%) died at home, 265 (27%) died in the hospice, 227 (23%) died in a care home and 168 (17%) died in hospital. In all, 549 (56%) of patients completed ACP, 422 (44%) did not. During the first 6 months of the study period, 42% of patients completed ACP. During the last 6 months, this had increased to 69%. This figure had steadily increased, when looked at in 6-month periods. The mean number of days between completion of ACP and death was 86 (range 0–555 days) with 40% of people having done ACP within 100 days before dying and 75% within 364 days. Overall, 55% of female subjects completed ACP and 57% of male subjects. Mean age of female subjects completing ACP was 75.8 years and non-ACP was 74.7 years. Mean age of male subjects who completed ACP was 74.8 years and non-ACP was 74.4 years. Impact of ACP on place of death is shown in figure 1.

The overall percentage hospital death rate for patients who had completed ACP was 11% (table 2) Choice of preferred place of death is shown in figure 2. Table 3 compares choices for cancer and non cancer diagnoses. For those without ACP, this was 26%; p value<0.001.

In all, 50 (10%) of the cancer patients who did ACP died in hospital and 94 (26%) of the cancer patients without ACP died in hospital; p value<0.001.

Overall, 88% of people who had completed ACP had at least one emergency admission in the last year of life and 91% of people who had not done ACP had at least one emergency admission; p value 0.71.

For people who died in hospital, the mean number of days spent in hospital in the last year was 26.5 days. For people who did not die in hospital, the mean number of days in hospital in the last year was 20.5 days. The mean cost of hospital care in the last year of life for those who died in hospital was £11 298. The mean cost of hospital care for those who died outside of hospital was £7730, with a difference of £3569; p value of <0.001 (table 4).

The p value for the difference in the number of days in hospital for cancer patients (20.2 days) compared with non-cancer (30.6 days) was <0.001 (table 5).

DISCUSSION

This study shows that it is possible to make ACP a routine part of care for hospice patients. During the first 6 months of the study period, 42% of patients had completed ACP. This had increased to 69% during the final 6 months and in the subsequent 6 months following the study had further increased to 77%. ACP has been seen as an integral part of the work of the whole hospice and effort has been made to make its use part of normal care. The proportional impact of ACP on place of death remained constant throughout the study. The use of an EPR has meant that it has been possible to monitor the use of ACP and the impact on place of death on a monthly basis. The use of the EPR has made data collection and analysis a lot more straightforward. The monthly audit of the EPR has meant that data completeness has been very high, with only two of 971 records not having place of death recorded.

The use of ACP was correlated with a significant impact on place of death, with 75% of patients dying in their place of choice. Hospital death rates for people who had completed ACP were 11%. Without ACP this was 26%. This latter figure is still low in comparison with national averages, where the hospital death rate for England is 54%. This is likely to reflect in part the impact of specialist palliative care on place of death. Hospices have historically done well enabling patients to stay out of hospital even without ACP. The use of ACP helps further over and above the impact of specialist palliative care alone.
In our study, this approach appears to be justified in both the cancer and non-cancer settings. Specialist palliative care has become increasingly involved in non-cancer terminal illnesses. In all, 59% of the non-cancer patients used ACP. The overall hospital death rate in this group was 18%. It seems unlikely that the non-cancer group was representative of non-cancer terminal diagnoses in the population, as the numbers were relatively small. The majority of patients with non-cancer terminal diagnoses do not receive specialist palliative care. The referred group will have had particular needs that required the use of hospice services. Nevertheless, the results suggest that use of ACP is applicable in the non-cancer setting and this has a significant impact on place of death. What was notable was that none of the non-cancer patients chose to die in hospital.

Gomes and colleagues conducted an extensive study using telephone interviews to ask the general population about their preferences of place of death. In this study, depending on region, more than 60% of people would choose to die at home (range 60%–67%), 26%–32% would choose to die in a hospice, and the remaining would choose to die in a care home, hospital or elsewhere. In our study, which had 87% cancer patients, 55% chose to die at home, 23% chose the hospice, 21% chose a care home and 1% chose hospital. These latter figures are for patients who have a terminal illness and are making a decision about where they would like to die. Although there are some similarities in these figures, the differences are likely to be due to a combination of the reality of having a terminal illness as well as our study population all being known to the hospice.

The hospital death rate for cardiovascular cause of death for any mention on the death certificate for England is 60.5% and for respiratory disease is 67.6%. These results suggest that the more widespread use of ACP in the non-cancer setting could result in a shift of deaths from hospital into the community. In this study, only a small percentage of non-cancer patients chose to die in the hospice. It is hard to know if this result is generalisable. It has meant that the hospice has not been overwhelmed by large numbers of non-cancer patients wanting to die on the inpatient unit.

The mean number of days spent in hospital in the last year of life for those patients who had completed ACP was 8.3 days less than those who had not. The overall cost of hospital admissions in the last year was £3569 less for those people who died outside of hospital. Both of these figures had highly significant p values. It seems likely that this figure is an underestimate of changes that would result in ACP being used more widely. The hospital death rate in the non-ACP group was 26%. The hospice is effective at reducing hospital death rates even when ACP has not been done. The national average is 54%.

The mean number of admissions in the last year was 5.4 in the ACP group and 6.1 in the non-ACP group. This latter figure did not have a significant p value. The mean number of emergency admissions in the group of people who died in hospital was significantly higher than those who died outside of hospital, although the total number of admissions in ACP verses non-ACP group was not significant. This may indicate that the final admission was an emergency one and could potentially be avoided.

### Table 2
Proportion of patients achieving their preferred place of death and percentage hospital deaths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of Death</th>
<th>Achieved preferred place of death</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number who died in hospital</th>
<th>Percentage who died in hospital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Care home</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospice</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3
Proportion of choices for preferred place of death for cancer and non-cancer patients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PPD</th>
<th>Cancer % (numbers)</th>
<th>Non-cancer % (numbers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>53 (253)</td>
<td>67 (49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care home</td>
<td>20 (97)</td>
<td>27 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospice</td>
<td>26 (123)</td>
<td>6 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>1 (7)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 8 (11%) patients with a non-cancer diagnosis who had completed ACP died in hospital. Of those who did not complete ACP, 16 (29%) died in hospital (p value 0.14). ACP, advance care planning; PPD, preferred place of death.
A previous paper in our locality\textsuperscript{12} showed the mean cost of the final admission to be £3093 in 2006. The mean difference in costs in the last year of life is larger than this figure and suggests that potential reinvestment and savings opportunities exist based on the results from this study. Estimation of hospital costs is complicated by whether or not there was a difference in the use of chemotherapy in the ACP group compared with the non-ACP group. Similar numbers of hospital admissions, including day case, suggest that both ACP and non-ACP patients had similar amounts of chemotherapy. The oncology and palliative care services in our locality work closely together and shared care of patients is common as their disease progresses. This may indicate that decision making about the use of chemotherapy has already been optimised to reflect end of life care. Irrespective of ACP, death in hospital increased significantly the number of days spent in hospital in the last year of life, with increased mean costs of £11,299 compared with £7,730 for death outside of hospital.

The impact of the use of ACP on length of life is unknown. A study of lung cancer in the USA\textsuperscript{13} showed that those who accessed specialist palliative care lived longer and used less chemotherapy than those who did not. Chemotherapy use in the UK may be different as their disease progresses. This may indicate that decision making about the use of chemotherapy has already been optimised to reflect end of life care. Irrespective of ACP, death in hospital increased significantly the number of days spent in hospital in the last year of life, with increased mean costs of £11,299 compared with £7,730 for death outside of hospital.

The assumptions made in the End of Life Care Strategy\textsuperscript{1} that more people when asked would choose to die outside of hospital, and that it is possible to look after people successfully in their place of choice, are strengthened by the results from this paper, particularly for patients with cancer. It remains uncertain if people have been informed about their prognosis and by when, if at all, the wishes of patients have changed. This is because of the lack of discussion of end of life wishes in the UK, and the absence of an end of life care strategy. The planning of end of life care does not consider the effects of ACP. The number of days spent in hospital in the last year and reduced hospital costs for those people who died outside of hospital.

The oncology and palliative care services in our locality work closely together and shared care of patients is common as their disease progresses. This may indicate that decision making about the use of chemotherapy has already been optimised to reflect end of life care. Irrespective of ACP, death in hospital increased significantly the number of days spent in hospital in the last year of life, with increased mean costs of £11,299 compared with £7,730 for death outside of hospital.

The impact of the use of ACP on length of life is unknown. A study of lung cancer in the USA\textsuperscript{13} showed that those who accessed specialist palliative care lived longer and used less chemotherapy than those who did not. Chemotherapy use in the UK may be different as their disease progresses. This may indicate that decision making about the use of chemotherapy has already been optimised to reflect end of life care. Irrespective of ACP, death in hospital increased significantly the number of days spent in hospital in the last year of life, with increased mean costs of £11,299 compared with £7,730 for death outside of hospital.

The assumptions made in the End of Life Care Strategy\textsuperscript{1} that more people when asked would choose to die outside of hospital, and that it is possible to look after people successfully in their place of choice, are strengthened by the results from this paper, particularly for patients with cancer. It remains uncertain if people have been informed about their prognosis and by when, if at all, the wishes of patients have changed. This is because of the lack of discussion of end of life wishes in the UK, and the absence of an end of life care strategy. The planning of end of life care does not consider the effects of ACP. The number of days spent in hospital in the last year and reduced hospital costs for those people who died outside of hospital.

Use of ACP is an integral part of the End of Life Care Strategy.\textsuperscript{1} If we are going to offer choices about place of death to people with terminal diagnoses, we need to be able to identify them and have the discussion around ACP with sufficient time. In all, 75% of patients who did ACP stated their wishes within the last year of life, with a mean value of expressing preferences 86 days before dying. This means that hospice staff manage to identify and complete ACP discussions on average 3 months before people die. Prediction of prognosis is notoriously difficult. It may be that the advent of ACP discussions is a marker for terminal decline.

\textbf{CONCLUSIONS}

The assumptions made in the End of Life Care Strategy\textsuperscript{1} that more people when asked would choose to die outside of hospital, and that it is possible to look after people successfully in their place of choice, are strengthened by the results from this paper, particularly for patients with cancer. It remains uncertain if people have been informed about their prognosis and by when, if at all, the wishes of patients have changed. This is because of the lack of discussion of end of life wishes in the UK, and the absence of an end of life care strategy. The planning of end of life care does not consider the effects of ACP. The number of days spent in hospital in the last year and reduced hospital costs for those people who died outside of hospital.

A prospective randomised study is needed to be able to determine the relationships of ACP use, place of death and cost with more certainty. The study was able to demonstrate associations among use of ACP, reduced total days spent in hospital in the last year and reduced hospital costs for those people who died outside of hospital.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{lcccc}
\hline
\textbf{Impact of ACP on mean number of days in hospital in the last year of life, number of admissions and costs of emergency admissions in the last year of life (95% CI)} \\
\hline
\textbf{ACP} & \textbf{No ACP} & \textbf{Total} & \textbf{p Value} & \textbf{t Test two-sided p value} \\
\hline
\textbf{Mean stay for all admissions} & 26.5 (20.8 to 32.2) & 20.6 (18.5 to 22.7) & 21.5 (19.6 to 23.5) & 0.03 & 0.03 \\
\textbf{Mean number of admissions} & 6.4 (4.9 to 7.9) & 4.7 (4.3 to 5.4) & 5.1 (4.5 to 5.6) & <0.001 & <0.001 \\
\textbf{Mean number of emergency admissions} & 2.2 (1.9 to 2.5) & 1.6 (1.4 to 1.7) & 1.7 (1.5 to 1.8) & 0.2 & 0.3 \\
\textbf{Mean cost of all admissions} & 11,299 (9161 to 13,436) & 7730 (7079 to 8381) & 8310 (7659 to 8962) & 0.4 & 0.4 \\
\textbf{Mean cost of emergency admissions} & 8310 (7659 to 8962) & 7730 (7079 to 8381) & 11,299 (9161 to 13,436) & 0.4 & 0.4 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Impact of ACP on mean number of days in hospital in the last year of life, number of admissions and costs of emergency admissions in the last year of life (95% CI).}
\end{table}

\textit{p} Value compares ACP with non-ACP.

Multivariate analysis investigating factors affecting the likelihood of death in hospital suggests that ACP is a significant factor. People who have had ACP reduce the odds of dying in hospital nearly 70% lower than people who do not. Gender, age or cause of death did not have a significant effect.

ACP, advance care planning.
to be seen as to whether the same principles are applicable in the non-cancer setting. The routine use of ACP has yet to be proven, particularly as the bulk of these discussions would need to be done by generalists in palliative care.

Acknowledgements Clare-Louise Nicholls and Anne Sumerhill from North Somerset PCT helped with data collection for days in hospital and costs.

Competing interests None.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

Open Access This is an Open Access article distributed in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial (CC BY-NC 3.0) license, which permits others to distribute, remix, adapt, build upon this work non-commercially, and license their derivative works on different terms, provided the original work is properly cited and the use is non-commercial. See: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/

REFERENCES
The impact of advance care planning of place of death, a hospice retrospective cohort study

Julian Abel, Andy Pring, Alison Rich, Tariq Malik and Julia Verne

BMJ Support Palliat Care 2013 3: 168-173 originally published online
March 14, 2013
doi: 10.1136/bmjspcare-2012-000327

Updated information and services can be found at:
http://spcare.bmj.com/content/3/2/168

These include:

References
This article cites 8 articles, 2 of which you can access for free at:
http://spcare.bmj.com/content/3/2/168#BIBL

Open Access
This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial License, which permits use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non commercial and is otherwise in compliance with the license. See: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/ and http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/legalcode

Email alerting service
Receive free email alerts when new articles cite this article. Sign up in the box at the top right corner of the online article.

Topic Collections
Articles on similar topics can be found in the following collections
Open access (60)

Notes

To request permissions go to:
http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions

To order reprints go to:
http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform

To subscribe to BMJ go to:
http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/