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Background Making treatment decisions in anticipation of possible future incapacity is an important part of patient participation in end-of-life decision-making. **Aim** To compare the prevalence of GP-patient end-of-life treatment discussions and patient surrogate appointments in Italy, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands and examine associated factors.

Methods A cross-sectional, retrospective survey was conducted with representative GP networks in four countries. GPs recorded the health and care characteristics in the last 3 months of life of patients who died non-suddenly. Prevalences were estimated and between country differences, and country-specific associated patient and care factors, were examined using logistic regressions.

Results 4396 non-sudden deaths were included. GP-patient discussion of treatment preferences occurred for 10%, 7%, 25% and 47% of Italian, Spanish, Belgian and of Dutch patients respectively. Furthermore, 6%, 5%, 16% and 29% of Italian, Spanish, Belgian and Dutch patients had a surrogate decision-maker. Despite some country-specific differences, previous GP-patient diagnosis discussions, more frequent GP contact, GP provision of palliative care, the importance of palliative care as a treatment aim and place of death were positively associated with preference discussions or surrogate appointments. A diagnosis of dementia was negatively associated with preference discussions and surrogate appointments. The single most important factor was prior GP-patient diagnosis discussion.

Discussion The study revealed a higher prevalence of treatment preference discussions and surrogate appointments in the two northern European countries.

Conclusion Delaying diagnosis discussions impedes anticipatory planning, whereas early discussions for all patients, particularly those with cognitive decline, and palliative care provision support patients' participation in decision-making.

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END-OF-LIFE MEDICAL TREATMENT PREFERENCE DISCUSSIONS AND SURROGATE DECISION-MAKER APPOINTMENTS: EVIDENCE FROM ITALY, SPAIN, BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS

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