Background The COVID-19 pandemic caused far-reaching disruption and medical education had to rapidly adapt to overcome the many challenges. Palliative and end of life care (PEOLC) is a core competency for all UK graduating medical students, and may involve emotionally confronting topics requiring great care during teaching sessions, which is potentially difficult in a virtual environment. The ability of medical schools to foster experiential PEOLC learning may also have been impacted. However, the pandemic may have been a catalyst for some positive changes in PEOLC teaching too. Assessment of PEOLC teaching has evolved from informal student feedback to the use of formal examination in relevant clinical environments. However, in 38% of schools students are allocated less than one week (average 2 days) in total to attend clinical areas relating to PEOLC. The number of PEOLC teaching topics addressed in each survey has increased (respectively 8, 15, 19, 21, and 29 topics) and are reported to be covered in greater detail. Assessment of PEOLC has grown to become a mandated subject with its own widening curriculum. The quantity and quality of medical school PEOLC teaching has increased over the last forty years, with students spending more time meeting patients with palliative care needs. There is however great variability in what is provided, and recent literature on the preparedness of new doctors suggests that there is still considerable room for improvement.

Results An anonymised web-based 46-item questionnaire was sent to the PEOLC Teaching Lead(s) at 35 UK medical schools. Results were compared between all previous surveys.

Conclusions PEOLC has grown to become a mandated subject with its own widening curriculum. The number and quality of medical school PEOLC teaching has increased over the last forty years, with students spending more time meeting patients with palliative care needs. There is however great variability in what is provided, and recent literature on the preparedness of new doctors suggests that there is still considerable room for improvement.