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PALLIATIVE CARE RESEARCH ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND OVER THE LAST DECADE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Background As palliative care research continues to expand across Europe, and the world, questions exist about the nature and type of research undertaken in addition to the research priorities for the future. This systematic review examined palliative care research conducted on the island over the last decade.

Methods A comprehensive search strategy was implemented and strict eligibility criteria were applied in order to identify relevant peer-reviewed journal articles. Inclusion criteria were all of the palliative care studies undertaken on the island of Ireland and published between January 2002 and May 2012. These were assessed in relation to year, setting, sample size, research methodology, and relevant findings.

Results 412 publications were identified for screening and their abstracts obtained. After eliminating articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria, 151 remained for further analysis. A thematic analysis of 128 studies published between 2006 and 2012 revealed eight core themes: (1) specific groups/ populations; (2) services and settings; (3) management of symptoms (physical, psychological, social); (4) bereavement; (5) communication and education; (6) death and dying; (7) spirituality; and (8) complementary and alternative medicine/intervention (CAM). There was an upward trend in the number of publications in palliative care research over the last ten years with over 72% of studies being published within the previous four years. A slightly higher number of studies were quantitative in nature followed by qualitative, mixed methods, and systematic reviews.

Conclusion Whilst there has been a welcome growth in palliative care research across Ireland, this has largely been needs-based and small scale studies. In contrast, international researchers and decision makers recommend the need for more outcomes focused multidisciplinary research. An examination of palliative care research is an essential first step in seeking to develop future priority areas for further research, highlighting opportunities for future collaboration both nationally and internationally.