

## Introduction

Educating health professionals about palliative care (PC) is at the forefront of Pallium Canada's mission. To this end, Pallium Canada has developed interprofessional courses for doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other professionals, called Learning Essential Approaches to Palliative Care (LEAP). There are different versions of LEAP courses to address different settings and diseases. LEAP Health Sciences aims to educate a broader range of undergraduate learners aspiring to become health professionals, prior to undertaking degrees in medicine, nursing or one of the other health-related fields, including health administration and public health. It therefore introduces future healthcare providers and leaders to the basics of palliative care and Compassionate Communities (CCs). It aims to foster positive attitudes towards palliative care among individuals who are a part of a broad community network who can then strive towards a compassionate social environment.

*“ Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family. ”*

– Kofi Annan

## LEAP Health Sciences: An Overview

1-day course that uses a variety of learning methods, including interactive reviews, small and large group discussions, individual reflections, videos and real life examples. It is limited to about 30 learners and covers topics such as defining what palliative and end-of-life care is and its relevance in the health care system, the needs of patients with progressive diseases, palliative care services, Advance Care Planning (ACP), CCs and essential conversations related to palliative care and a good death. LEAP Health Sciences was created by combining the clinical content of a clinical LEAP course and a public health approach through the core concepts from the Compassionate City Charter.

This poster describes the findings of the pilot course. The Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at Brock University was the first site and the optional course was offered free of charge to 22 students.

### Course objectives

1. Demystify palliative care and death.
2. Highlight the need for essential conversations [e.g ACP]
3. Understand the impact of societal attitudes on end-of-life care.
4. Navigate complex clinical, social and ethical decisions.
5. Identify the key principles of pain and symptom management as well as myths about opioid use.
6. Provide an understanding of the significance of building Compassionate Communities to support all end-of-life care needs.

### Evaluation Methods

- ☐ Pre- and post course surveys on Knowledge and Attitudes developed for the course.
- ☐ Course evaluation survey (closed and open ended- questions post course)

## Outcomes

The majority of the participants gained a **better understanding of PC** and **recommended** the course for other students:

### Participant Satisfaction

**100%**

18/18 participants recommended this course to other health sciences students.



### Knowledge Transfer

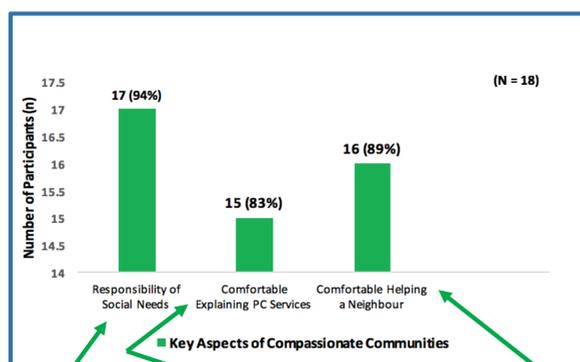
**94%**

17/18 participants reported having a better understanding of palliative care and palliative care services.

**77%**

13/18 participants recognized that introducing palliative care to patients with serious illnesses does not cause unnecessary psychological distress.

Participants gained an understanding of the **core components of a Compassionate Community** and indicated a positive social outlook on supporting others around death and dying as shown in Figure 1.



Identifying a patient's social needs is not only the responsibility of a social worker.

The types of palliative care services that exist

Comfortable helping a neighbour map his or her social network

Figure 1: The participants' level of understanding of the core components of a Compassionate Community.

The participants demonstrated an understanding of ACP, its significance and an **attitude change** through their willingness to promote ACP within their social network – meeting the second and fourth course objective:

### Attitude Change

**88%**

15/18 participants were comfortable with discussing Advance Care Planning (ACP) with their parents or family members.



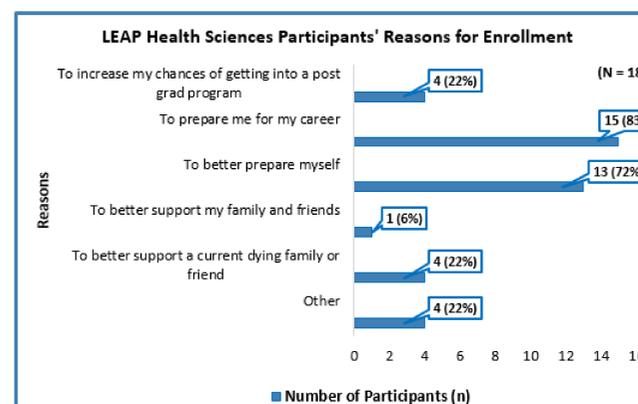
## Personal Connections

**78%**

14/18 participants agreed that the course supports them with their "...own end-of-life decisions in the future" and helps them initiate discussions around death, dying, loss and caregiving within their social network.



Many of the participants identified the **personal connections** they made with the content and willingly shared their experiences regarding *palliative care, death, dying, loss or caregiving* during group discussions throughout the pilot. This demonstrates the need for this educational experience through which conversations about these natural life events can be integrated into post-secondary institutions.



\*Note: The responses for "Other" demonstrated the aim to gain educational, professional and personal or social advancement.

Figure 2: The participants' reasons for enrolling in the LEAP Health Sciences pilot course are highlighted here.

### Participant A:

*"As someone who has had to face their own mortality through cancer, palliative care was a foreign concept to me. After completing the LEAP HS course, palliative care, in my mind, became a new method of having a great quality of life even in death."*

### Participant B:

*"Having worked in long term care as director of care, palliative care is not often available to seniors, giving them no other option than to spend their last days in hospital. After taking the Leap Health Sciences course, I hope to provide more end-of-life options to our seniors and their families, helping them to make informed choices in how they would like to spend their final days."*

## Discussion

- ✦ The course sparked interest from students who have not been exposed to palliative care education in their undergraduate career as shown in Figure 2.
- ✦ The course was very highly rated by students who reported a much heightened awareness of the topic and also how it could empower them on a personal level as well.
- ✦ There was also interest shown by other programs—Nursing—and faculties—Social Sciences—to provide PC education to their students.
- ✦ Learners found the course too short for the content to be covered and have recommended that a) it be a longer duration, and b) become a regular course within the Health Sciences department.
- ✦ Some students personally contacted the Dean and the Chair of the program advocating that this become a part of their curriculum.
- ✦ This course has the potential to educate the leaders of tomorrow across various health and social sectors on palliative care, experiences around death as well as supporting one another during such experiences by building and nurturing Compassionate Communities.

## Next Steps:

- ✦ Brock University aims to run a revised pilot in March 2018 and is exploring embedding this course into the Health Sciences department for fourth year undergraduate students by Fall of 2018. Moreover, the University's Health Sciences department now aims to offer this as an official health science course for fourth year undergraduate students.

## Conclusions: The Journey From Here

- ✦ Palliative care training in undergraduate health sciences courses appears to be very well received by students and holds potential. These students often go on to study medicine, nursing and other allied health disciplines or become public health leaders, managers and researchers. Exposing them to this important field sensitizes them as future professionals but also increases their awareness of their roles in nurturing compassionate communities. It also has personal relevance in their own lives.
- ✦ The merits and logistics of integrating such a course into undergraduate Health Sciences curricula warrants further exploration and advocacy.

