

How many EMS calls are dispatched to end-of-life patients?

Analysis of national registers

Center for Palliative Care
Prague
Czech Republic

Marek Uhlíř^{1,2}, David Peřan¹, Jaroslav Pekara¹, Martin Loučka²
1 Prague Emergency Medical Services, Prague, Czech Republic
2 Center for Palliative Care, Prague, Czech Republic

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BACKGROUND

Emergency medical services (EMS) play an important and under-explored role in palliative care, as they are frequently responding to calls involving patients in advanced stages of incurable diseases. But what does “frequently” mean? An estimate was previously only available for Germany – 3% of the EMS calls being dispatched to end-of-life cancer patients.¹

AIM

We analysed incidence of EMS transports of end-of-life patients in order to quantify the extent of the problem. The data were obtained from three national registers administered by The Institute of Health Information and Statistics of the Czech Republic, year 2018.

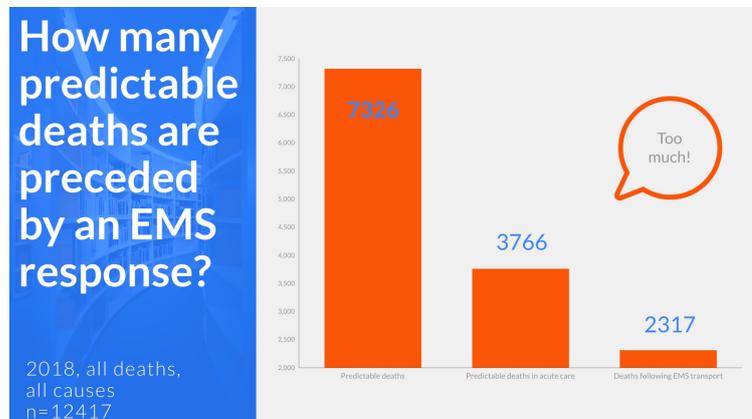
METHODS

Retrospective analysis of all deaths in 2018, asking two questions:

1. “How many Czech cancer patients are attended to by EMS in the last 3 and 30 days of their life?”
2. “How many deaths, considered as predictable², are preceded in the period of 3 and 30 days before death by an EMS response in Prague?”

RESULTS

1. EMS intervened in the last 30 days of their lives in 5583 cancer patients (20.2% of all CZ cancer deaths).
2. From a total of 12,417 deaths in Prague in 2018, 7,326 could be seen as predictable based on diagnosis and hospitalization history. More than a half of these patients died in acute-care settings (n=3,766). 2,317 of these patients were transported to their last hospitalization by EMS. This accounted for 1.9 % of all Prague EMS events (n=121,887 per year).



CONCLUSION

Every one in five cancer deaths in CZ is preceded by an EMS transport. Almost 2 % of all EMS calls in Prague are dispatched to patients with unmet palliative care needs. EMS therefore plays a key role in end-of-life trajectories and could represent an important, yet underrated, element in palliative care.

FUNDING

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¹ Wiese CHRR, Bartels UE, Ruppert D, et al. Treatment of palliative care emergencies by prehospital emergency physicians in Germany: An interview based investigation. *Palliat Med.* 2009;23(4):369–373. doi:10.1177/0269216309102987
² Predictable deaths were identified amongst all deaths in 2018 by The Institute of Health Information and Statistics based on diagnosis and hospitalization history; methodology derived from Murtagh, 2014