

PUBLIC POLICIES AND THE URGENCY OF PALLIATIVE CARE IN ONCOLOGY: A NATION PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction: Palliative care is a comprehensive approach aimed at actively caring for individuals suffering from serious illnesses, such as cancer, to ensure quality of life from early identification to end-of-life stages. Given that cancer is the second leading cause of death worldwide, there is an increasing need for the provision of palliative care. This study aims to demonstrate the necessity for the implementation and expansion of public policies focused on oncological palliative care. **Objectives:** To highlight the importance of integrating palliative care into public health policies to improve the quality of life for cancer patients. **Methods:** A cross-sectional study utilizing public data from the National Cancer Institute (INCA) for the years 2023–2025 at the national level. As the data do not identify subjects, ethical approval was not required. Additionally, a narrative review was conducted using bibliographic research from the SciELO and PubMed databases over the past five years. **Results:** It is estimated that Brazil will experience 704,000 new cancer cases between 2023 and 2025. As cancer poses a significant public health issue, the adoption of intensive comfort care that promotes quality end-of-life experiences is imperative, considering the human right to comprehensive assistance. Palliative care should be integrated across all levels of the Unified Health System (SUS). However, challenges such as a biomedical model focused on therapeutic obstinacy, difficulties in early diagnosis, lack of palliative care protocols, and insufficient specialized teams hinder effective care delivery. This scenario demands more qualified responses from Brazilian health policies; however, a specific policy for organizing and providing such care across assistance levels is still lacking, leading to fragmented care and disrupted comprehensive follow-up. **Conclusion:** The number of individuals affected by cancer is increasing. Despite advancements to date, an effective change in the current fragmented health model is necessary. This includes ensuring healthcare professionals receive training from undergraduate education through professional practice, establishing international partnerships for technical-scientific support, and promoting public dissemination and discussion on the importance of the topic. Therefore, there is an urgent need to expand public policies focused on palliative care that enhance care quality and dignity in the final stages of life.

Keywords: Cancer; palliative care; public health policy; quality of life; end-of-life care.