

Love the Liver and Live Longer in the Liverland

Cuidar do Fígado em Fim de Vida

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Dear Editor,

We would like to highlight a concerning reality: the inadequacy of palliative care (PC) in patients with chronic liver disease (CLD). It is our opinion that these patients present complex clinical scenarios with particularities that can only be addressed with adequate training. Unfortunately, we feel that, in our country, the needs of this population are easily overlooked. We share some facts in order to underline the importance of the subject:

- With proper statistical analysis, liver disease has been suggested as the 7th/8th cause of death in Portugal and mortality from malignant hepato-biliary tumours and CLD seems to be increasing¹;
- Liver disease is a major cause of premature death and years of potential life lost, and therefore carries an overwhelming socioeconomic burden¹;
- Alcoholic liver disease is responsible for most liver disease related admissions in Portugal; the consumption of 12.3 L of alcohol per capita makes us the 11th heaviest consumers in Europe and the 2nd

heaviest consumers of wine^{1,2};

- Half of the Portuguese population is overweight and 25% has non-alcoholic liver disease, the prevalence of which is likely to increase³;
- CLD patients are unique in many ways. Complications such as hepatic encephalopathy or ascites require expert management as they signal the transition to a decompensated phase where liver transplantation can be considered. However, only 10% of patients will have access to transplantation. The burden of this process on patients and caregivers is important to consider;
- The symptom burden and quality of life impairment are not assessed in the current prognostic scores. A national study showed that 84.2% of cirrhotic patients required palliative intervention but only 8% of patients were actually referred for PC consultation⁴;
- Portugal occupies the 41st world position in terms of capacity to deliver PC and 37th in terms of PC human resources in a 2015 global ranking, with major gaps identified by national entities⁵;
- Investment in specific training and focused scientific research in the field of PC are urgently required and currently not included in any specialty curricula.

In conclusion, we would like to bring the field of hepatology and PC closer together by increasing the awareness and education regarding the subject.

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