Overview and Objectives:

This special methods course will provide the critical bridge between the more general research skills, which are the focus of the CRTP, and the particular challenges of doing patient-oriented research in palliative care. This 1-credit course, along with “Principles and Practice of Palliative Care,” is the cornerstone of the CRTP Concentration in Palliative Care. It consists of the following components:

- Discussion of the use of specific research methods and their strengths and limitations in palliative care;
- Review of landmark research articles in palliative care and a critical appraisal of the methodologies;

The course is taught in a graduate seminar fashion with an emphasis on discussion and critical analysis. Sessions will often be co-moderated by a palliative care physician and a researcher with the particular methodological expertise under discussion.

- The learning objectives for the 16-hour, 8-session course include:
  - Describe the various research methods that are commonly used in palliative care;
  - Describe the unique methodological issues raised by research in palliative care.
  - Describe the unique ethical issues raised by research in palliative care;
  - Describe some of the major research papers in palliative care.

Responsibilities:

- Evaluation: Students will be evaluated on the basis of their active engagement with assigned readings and their ability to apply the course material to a palliative care research project of their own. As written exercises, students will (1) write weekly critical reviews of published articles in terms of methods and results; and (2) at the mid-point in the course will write the Specific Aims for a research project in palliative care.

Course Requirements:

- See individual session requirements

Required Textbook(s):

- None

Supplemental Resources:

- NIH State-of-the-Science Conference on Improving End-of-Life Care http://consensus.nih.gov/PREVIOUSSTATEMENTS.htm#EndOfLifeCare 
  http://symptomresearch.nih.gov/index.htm (To view the webcasts as well as download both the AHCPR reports and the speaker summaries) http://symptomresearch.nih.gov/index.htm


• http://www.chcr.brown.edu/pcoc/toolkit.htm

Academic Integrity:

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity (http://www.provost.pitt.edu/info/ai1.html). Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

Course Schedule

Session 1: Quality of life/dying/patient preferences in palliative care research

At the conclusion of this lecture, the student will be able to:

1. To describe the positive and negatives of the various instruments used to measure quality of life in end-of-life care

2. To describe the analytical issues which complicate measuring patient assessed quality of life in palliative care

3. To describe the methodological issues involved in using surrogate’s assessment in palliative care research

4. To design a study examining the effect of discussions of advance care planning on the quality of life of patients with metastatic cancer and their families.

Topics:

1. Quality of life/dying/patient preferences in palliative care research

Required Reading(s):


**Recommended Reading(s):**


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**Session 2: Ethical and logistic issues raised by research in palliative care**

**At the conclusion of this lecture, the student will be able to:**

1. To describe three unique ethical problems in using palliative care subjects for research

2. To describe three unique ethical issues associated with informed consent in palliative care research

3. To describe ways to deal with the unique ethical issues associated with palliative care research

4. To describe logistical issues associated with the enrollment of patients into palliative care studies

**Topics:**

1. Ethical and logistic issues raised by research in palliative care

**Required Reading(s):**


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**Session 3: Education Research**

**At the conclusion of this lecture, the student will be able to:**

1. To describe the variables that one would want to measure when assessing palliative care education

2. To describe the advantages and disadvantages of using survey, focus group and observational methodologies to assess students’ education in palliative care

3. To design a study examining the influence of the “informal curriculum” on students’ palliative care education.

**Topics:**
1. Education Research

Required Reading(s):


Recommended Reading(s):


Session 4: Health service research in palliative care

At the conclusion of this lecture, the student will be able to:

1. To describe the various national databases for examining palliative care variables

2. To describe some of the methods that can be used to assess the impact of organizational variables in end of life care
3. To describe the methodological issues associated with economic analysis in palliative care

**Topics:**

1. Variations in health care utilization using large databases
2. Organizational variables in palliative care
3. Economic analysis in palliative care

**Required Reading(s):**

1. Peruse the Dartmouth Atlas of Health Care, http://www.dartmouthatlas.org/. Use the “Data Table” function to compare end-of-life health services utilization in the Pittsburgh HRR to another HRR of interest to you, and to compare hospitals within Pittsburgh’s HRR.


**Recommended Reading(s):**


3. [http://symptomresearch.nih.gov/chapter_18/index.htm](http://symptomresearch.nih.gov/chapter_18/index.htm)

4. [http://www.dartmouthatlas.org](http://www.dartmouthatlas.org)

**Session 5: Symptom focused research in palliative care**

**At the conclusion of this lecture, the student will be able to:**

1. To describe two different validated instruments for assessing symptoms in palliative care symptoms

2. To describe the methodological issues associated with clinical trials designed to decrease symptoms in individual patients

3. To critical review the studies of antidepressants for neuropathic pain

4. To design a new study of an antidepressant for metastatic cancer related neuropathic pain

**Topics:**
1. Epidemiological reviews of symptom focused research
2. Interventional studies of symptom focused research

**Required Reading(s):**

1. [http://www.symptomresearch.nih.gov](http://www.symptomresearch.nih.gov); Chapter 1-3
3. Von Gunten, CF. Interventions to manage symptoms at the end of life. J Pall Med 8: (s1):

**Recommended Reading(s):**

1. [http://www.cher.brown.edu/pcoc/BIBLIOGRAPHIES.HTM](http://www.cher.brown.edu/pcoc/BIBLIOGRAPHIES.HTM)
2. [http://www.symptomresearch.nih.gov](http://www.symptomresearch.nih.gov); Chapter 6 and 19
5. J Pall Med. V8: (supp1)

**Session 6: Caregiver research**

**At the conclusion of this lecture, the student will be able to:**

1. To describe the various tools for measuring the effects of bereavement, strategies for conducting bereavement research
2. To describe the health effects of care giving and how bereavement impacts caregivers
3. To describe three major methodological issues associated with conducted bereavement research
4. To develop a study examining how pre-death interventions might affect the bereavement process

**Topics:**

1. Health effects of care giving
2. Bereavement in the context of care giving
3. Preparedness for death
4. Qualitative and quantitative methods used to study care giving

**Required Reading(s):**


**Required Recommended(s):**


2. [http://www.chcr.brown.edu/pcoc/Griefa.htm](http://www.chcr.brown.edu/pcoc/Griefa.htm)

**Session 7: Quality improvement/system change research in palliative care**

**At the conclusion of this lecture, the student will be able to:**

1. To describe the process of rapid sequence quality improvement

2. To describe the methodological issues associated with quality improvement research

3. To design a study to determine if the quality of dying has been improved by a palliative care service OR to determine if the quality improvement process in a nursing home has improved pain management in nursing home patients

**Topics:**

1. Measuring the impact of palliative care services

**Required Reading(s):**


**Session 8: Studying surrogate decision making in the ICU**

**At the conclusion of this lecture, the student will be able to:**

1. To describe the ways that qualitative methods can be used for palliative care research

2. To describe the methodological issues associated with qualitative research in palliative care
3. To describe the common method called ‘qualitative description’.

Topics:

1. Surrogate decision makers perspectives on discussing prognosis with physicians
2. Qualitative methods
3. Assessing rigor in qualitative research

Required Reading(s):