



Only 15 of 55 European countries guarantee mandatory palliative care training for all their medical students

- The research, led by the ATLANTES Global Observatory of Palliative Care at the University of Navarra together with Oslo University Hospital, as part of the JANE-2 project, has been published in the prestigious journal *The Lancet*.

Pamplona, 10 de octubre. Only 15 of 55 European countries (27%) guarantee compulsory university training in palliative care for all their future doctors. These include Germany, Finland, France, Ireland, Hungary and Latvia. This is revealed by research led by the ATLANTES Global Observatory of Palliative Care at the Institute for Culture and Society (ICS) of the University of Navarra (Spain), in collaboration with the European Palliative Care Research Centre at Oslo University Hospital (Norway).

The study, published on World Hospice and Palliative Care Day, monitors all 55 countries of the World Health Organization (WHO) European Region, for which ATLANTES is a collaborating centre. It highlights a key relationship: countries with a national regulatory framework, whether binding or not, show significantly higher levels of palliative care teaching in their medical schools. The research has been published in *The Lancet Regional Health – Europe*, one of the world's leading academic journals in the field of health, thanks to its impact factor.

Titled Association between national regulatory frameworks and compulsory undergraduate palliative care education in Europe: a cross-sectional study of 55 countries, the study forms part of the JANE-2 project (Joint Action on Networks of Expertise on Cancer), funded by the EU4Health programme and linked to the European Plan for Fighting Cancer.

The map shows a deep inequality between countries, so that where a future doctor studies still determines whether they will receive training in the field of palliative care and whether it will be through a compulsory or an optional subject. Dr Carlos Centeno, principal investigator of the study and director of ATLANTES and of the Symptom Control Service and Palliative Medicine at the Clínica Universidad de Navarra, states that "although the situation is gradually improving compared with previous data, there is still a long way to go."

He points out that "in 17 European countries (31%), no medical school yet teaches the basic concepts of caring for seriously ill and end-of-life patients as part of a core subject." In these cases, access to training ranges from being non-existent to being offered through optional subjects.

France and Finland, two regulatory approaches

From a regulatory perspective, countries have opted for different frameworks to address palliative care education at university level. In any case, the regulatory effect is positive and gradual: in the 15 countries with binding regulation, training is delivered, on average, in all their medical schools; in the 9 where regulation is advisory or "recommendatory", the subject is offered in 75% of their medical schools.

Notable examples include France, a country with binding regulation where palliative care is taught in all 36 of its medical schools. To achieve this, in 2016 the country passed a standalone law establishing the acquisition of this knowledge as compulsory in initial medical training. In addition, the curricular content is set by ministerial decrees. In Finland, where there is no binding law, teaching is promoted



through national curricular recommendations and through the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. As a result, all five of its medical schools guarantee access to this learning for all their students.

Dr Centeno, who is also a professor at the School of Medicine, argues that "when a student understands that caring for serious illness and relieving suffering, even when a cure is not possible, it is part of a doctor's genome, their attitude lasts forever, whether they are a surgeon, a transplant specialist or a microbiologist. They will always have a palliative outlook." For this reason, he believes that "teaching palliative care to all future doctors in a country, within a period of ten years, completely changes the landscape of palliative medicine and patient care."

In this regard, he reminds us that this training is key to guaranteeing access to care for the patients who need it: "It is neither optional nor negotiable, but an essential requirement, aligned with the needs of society and with the fundamental values of the medical profession."

Professor Stein Kaasa leader of the work package on palliative care in Jane 2 calls for actions: "There is a threat to patients and their families that only 27% of the medical schools in Europe teach palliative medicine. Based upon these data The Jane 2 Joint Action program funded by EU will take actions –not only for undergraduate training– but also for post graduate training in palliative medicine as well as to formalize the specialisation in Palliative Medicine in Europe."