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The Misperceptions of Palliative Care



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Abstract

Palliative care is comfort care aimed at relieving pain and symptoms caused by a serious illness, regardless of the patient’s prognosis, age, or stage of disease. (Yoost & Crawford, 2020) The problem is that there are often multiple factors that act as barriers to the integration of palliative care. What are those factors, and how can we overcome them to ensure positive patient outcomes? This literature review summarizes previous research and the suggestions for improving the understanding of palliative care by patients and providers. There are common themes among the articles selected for review, and the main points include a lack of understanding from both patients and providers of what palliative care is, as well as the need for education to overcome the negative connotation associated with palliative care. Education for patients, families, and staff is a key component in helping everyone understand what palliative care is and how it can be used as an additional tool to help patients get through their illness.

We need to adopt a common language and/or a common language for explaining palliative care.

Background: Thoughts on Palliative Care

A friend currently fighting breast cancer:

“I don’t know what that is. What is it?”

A friend battling Hodgkin’s Lymphoma:

“No, that wasn’t mentioned, but I am not sure what it is.”

A family member with ovarian cancer:

“They said I could talk to someone about that, but I don’t know why I would need that right now. I am going to beat this!”

A friend concerning her aging mother:

“My mother just fell. Why does the doctor want to meet with me about palliative care? She is 83 and has plenty of years left.”

Problem

The barriers to integrating palliative care:

- Patient perspective on what palliative care is
- Lack of understanding the difference in palliative and hospice care
- Provider hesitancy to refer patients
- Negative connotation associated with palliative care

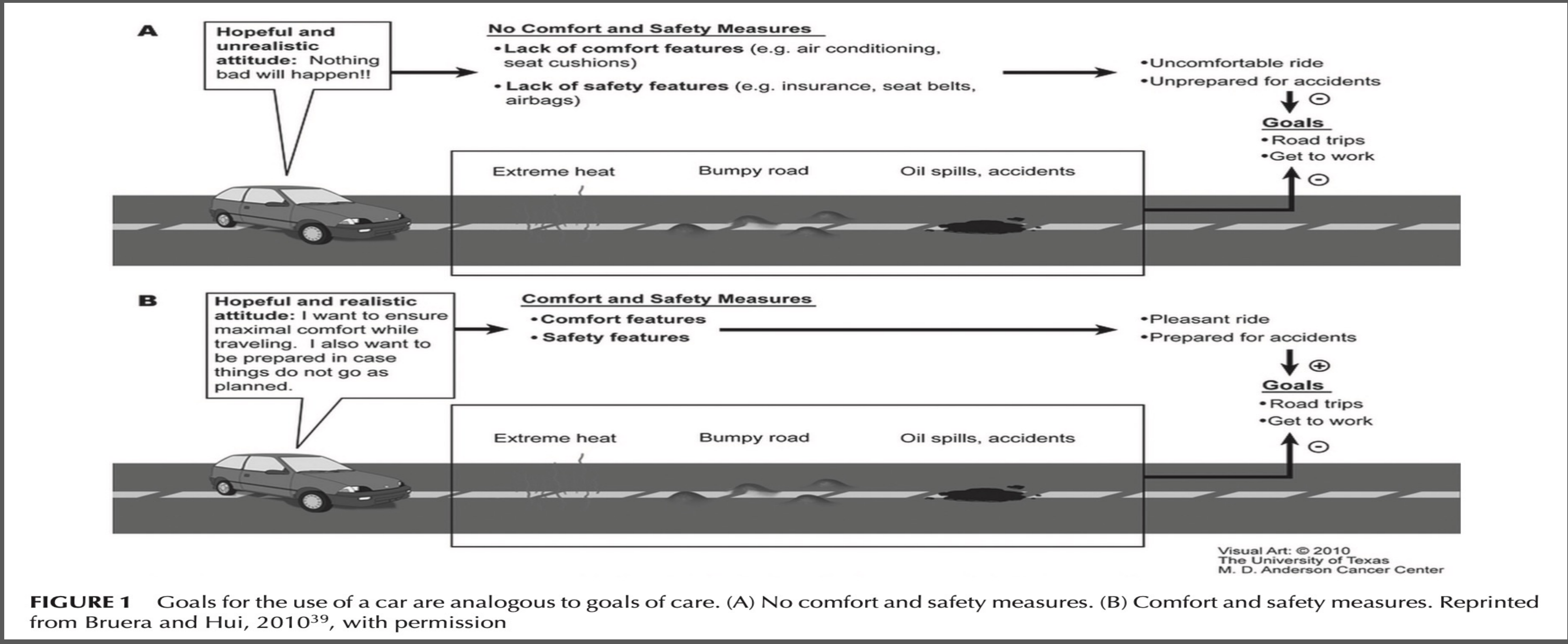
Results

There are common themes among the articles selected for this review. Researchers found that:

1. Lack of knowledge (need to education providers & patients)
2. Confusion
3. Recognized important of pain management and social support
4. Importance of early referral
5. Lack of understanding
6. Need for interdisciplinary collaboration

For Example:

One study described the “taking a road trip” metaphor to help providers discuss palliative care with patients. This metaphor compares the cancer journey to taking a road trip. “Palliative care services can be compared to robust roadside assistance programs that provide security during a road trip” and allow the patients to get to their destination in a safer, more comfortable manner. (Courteau, et al. 2018) With such safety features, they are better equipped to reach their goal.



Conclusion

- Lack of understanding by patients and providers about palliative care
- Negative connotations associated with palliative care
- Education regarding the role of palliative care
- Need for a common language
- Further research to document the benefits of palliative care