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### Volunteer Policy in Palliative Care in Flanders: A Content Analysis of Policy Documents

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**Topic:** Other disciplines, methods and care organization

**Research Design:** Qualitative

**Abstract:**

#### Abstract Number P02-262

**Background** Volunteers are considered a third resource of palliative care (PC), next to family and professional caregivers, and can potentially increase the quality of patient care. Yet, conflicting expectations exist regarding volunteer roles, which may lead to role strain and attrition. Moreover, it is unclear how policy pertaining to volunteering within PC services addresses these issues. Therefore, volunteering policies of PC services in Flanders (Belgium) were analyzed, in terms of measures to combat role strain and how these vary across services.

**Methods** A full-population sample of services providing dedicated – PC units, day-care centers and home-care teams – or generalist PC – sitting services, community home-care, medical oncology departments and a random sample of nursing homes – were asked for their volunteer policy documents in 2016. Qualitative content analysis was performed using a coding frame comprising four main measures to combat role strain: leadership behavior, co-worker support, formalization and empowerment.

**Results** 264 (N=334; 79%) organizations responded to the survey. 67% claim to have and 45% sent in policy documents. Policy varies considerably, with measures mainly focused on formal aspects: role description, supervision, intervention, governance. Supportive measures such as training, recognition, autonomy, teamwork and emotional support are less accentuated. Dedicated PC services describe leadership behavior, co-worker support and empowerment more extensively and more often than generalist PC services.

**Conclusion** Given that best practices to tackle volunteer role strain are not widely integrated in organizational policy, their importance may not be acknowledged and their implementation in practice limited. Dedicated PC services appear to employ more role strain-reducing measures than generalist PC services. Further research is warranted to determine the exact impact of these policy measures on volunteer role strain and attrition. This study was funded by IWT SBO nr 140009.



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