



# The “Drugs of choice in palliative care” brochure an instrument for the standardization of the therapeutic approach to terminal patients



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## Introductory remarks

### Background

The project is being implemented in the Province of Trento (520,000 inhabitants) where the *Comitato Ospedale senza dolore* (Painless Hospital Committee - COSD), aiming at promoting the access to pain therapy in healthcare settings, has been operating for years, together with the Services for Palliative Care of the Health Districts of Trento - Valle dei Laghi and Vallagarina, with multi-area competences, and an assisted living residence (hospice). The home management of terminal patients is assured through an integrated home care service (ADI or ADI palliative care). In both cases, general practitioners (about 400 physicians) guarantee that continuous care is provided through the coordination and the integration with palliative care specialist teams, if present.

### Introduction

Palliative care refers to therapeutic, diagnostic and care approaches, involving patients and their families, aimed at providing an active total care of patients with diseases with a poor prognosis, who no longer respond to specific treatments, through a comprehensive approach to patients (therapeutic, psychological, spiritual, social).

In order to standardize drug therapies in the entire provincial territory, professionals dealing with terminal patients should be provided with easily accessible information tools.

## Methods

### Project stages

1. Setting up of a multidisciplinary working team including representatives of the District Palliative Care Services and of the Pharmaceutical service (October 2008).
2. Identification by the Palliative Care Services of major problems affecting terminal patients, such as pain, gastrointestinal, respiratory and neurological disorders (November -December 2008);
3. Identification by the Palliative Care Services and by the Pharmaceutical Service of the most critical problems for the families, for care givers and for professionals, who operate in this setting, such as terminal sedation, end-of-life nutrition, the prescription and administration of drugs (January 2009).
4. Review of accredited literature and guidelines on palliative treatments (EBM, consensus conference etc.), of provisions concerning drug prescription, in particular for pain management, and of therapy supplying channels, in order to assure continuity between hospital and territory care (January – April 2009).
5. Drawing and distribution of the “Drugs of choice in palliative care” brochure (May - September 2009).

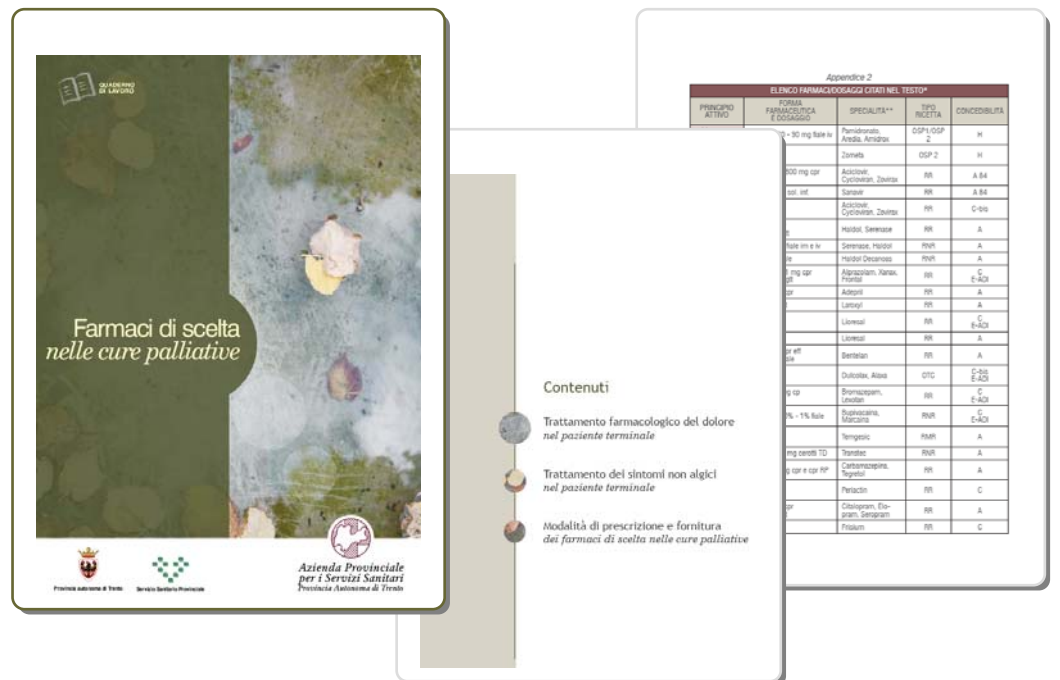
## Objectives

- Provide appropriate treatments
- Standardize the treatments at provincial level
- Make the life of patients and of families and/or caregivers easier, by favouring the access to care services
- Reinforce the palliative care culture

## Results

In July 2009, the multidisciplinary working team including representatives of District Palliative Care Services and of the Pharmaceutical Service drew up the “Drugs of choice in palliative care” brochure, divided into three sections:

- The first section concerns the drug treatment of oncological pain, often experienced as primary disease
- The second section concerns non painful symptoms (gastrointestinal, respiratory, neurological), requiring rapidly effective interventions and/or interventions aimed at improving the quality of life, with a right balance between therapeutic obstinacy and lack of treatment; a specific section deals with palliative sedation and end-of-life nutrition
- The third section provides information about the prescription and supply of drugs in order to help physicians in the prescription process and the patient in the access to therapies; the brochure also contains a list of the most common drugs employed and information about the access.



## Conclusions and transferability

The brochure is distributed to all Operative Units involved in the management of terminal patients and to all general practitioners (800 copies to date). It is also published on the Intranet site of the Provincial Health Authority and presented in workshops on palliative care held in the Province of Trento.

It is included in the information tools adopted by the *Comitato ospedale senza dolore* (COSD)

A questionnaire assessing the brochure's effectiveness will be administered one year after its distribution.

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