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Postgraduate



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Ethics of Cancer & Palliative Care

Centre for Professional Ethics

MA, PG Diploma

Full-time, Part-time,
Distance Learning

Keele University

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The Marie Curie
Palliative Care Institute

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and external expert speakers may also be invited to speak on the course. This is an exciting joint venture uniting academic and practical expertise.

We regard high levels of student participation in discussion as particularly important for teaching and learning in this area, and employ teaching techniques which encourage this wherever possible. Students come from a diverse range of professional backgrounds and a wide range of geographic locations. Past students have reported that meeting and exchanging ideas with others who work in different fields and in different parts of the country is one of the major benefits of the course.

The Ethics of Cancer and Palliative Care teaching team have many years experience of teaching postgraduate applied ethics courses. We are well aware of the special problems and challenges which may face mature students and those combining study with full-time work, and therefore we do our utmost to offer a supportive and stimulating environment for learning. Each student is assigned a personal supervisor from the teaching team, whom they can contact for help or advice at any time during the course.

In the most recent report from the Quality Assurance Agency involving external assessors, our Postgraduate Diploma and MA courses were awarded the top mark of 24 out of 24.

Course Structure and Content

Details correct at time of printing

The MA in the Ethics of Cancer and Palliative Care involves both taught sessions and a chance for students to write a dissertation on a topic of their choosing related to the course. Teaching occurs in four three-day modules that run between October and April. This innovative structure has proved particularly popular with health care professionals in full-time employment as it allows students to combine study with full time work. It also enables students who are based in all areas of the UK and beyond to attend. Contact between students and staff, and between students, is facilitated between modules to create a distinctive student community.

Aims of the Course

This course aims to deepen students' understanding of healthcare ethics in the fields related to cancer and palliative care, and to enhance their ability to think systematically about the moral issues that healthcare professionals may face in the course of their work. It also aims to provide a foundation for pursuing further study at doctoral level for those interested in doing so.

Introduction

Major advances in medical technology, increased expectations, and changing moral attitudes have combined to generate many complex ethical and legal problems in cancer and palliative care. Individuals who care for patients with life-threatening illnesses can face particularly pressing and difficult moral choices. This course provides an opportunity to gain a deeper and more systematic understanding of these issues, exploring the moral problems health care professionals may face.

Teaching is delivered in short intense blocks, enabling those in full-time employment to do the course part time and fit it around the demands of their work.

The course is taught in Liverpool by lecturers from Keele's Centre for Professional Ethics (PEAK) and staff from the Marie Curie Palliative Care Institute. From time to time, law lecturers from Keele University may provide specialist input,



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The MA requires the successful completion of 180 M-level credits, made up of four 30-credit taught modules and a 60-credit dissertation. It can be taken either full time or part time. When taken part time the four taught modules are completed in the first year, with the dissertation being completed in the second year. When taking this route there are no specific attendance requirements during the second year – you may meet your supervisor at mutually convenient times, keep in touch via email or phone, or use a combination of methods. If the course is being taken full time it can be completed within one year, with the dissertation being submitted at the start of September.

Some students may not want to do the whole course. An alternative route is to leave after completing the four taught modules. Successful completion of these will lead to the award of a Postgraduate Diploma in the Ethics of Cancer and Palliative Care.

Intercalation

Students studying medicine can opt to take a year out of their undergraduate medical studies in order to study a subject area in greater depth, before returning to complete their medical course. Intercalating students would take the MA in the Ethics of Cancer and Palliative Care as full time students to ensure that the course is completed within one year.

The content of the modules is briefly outlined below with illustrations the topics to be covered:

Module 1: Ethics and Palliative Care

In this block you are introduced to the main concepts and theories used in health care ethics. This is done in a number of ways that bring out their connection with issues of practical concern in cancer and palliative care. Module 1 normally contains topics such as: the shift from curative to palliative care; the context of care (e.g. hospital, hospice, home); the relationship between ethical and clinical considerations.

Module 2: Autonomy, Paternalism and Consent

Module 2 addresses issues within cancer and palliative care which relate to respect for the autonomy of patients and carers. Important topics normally include: truth-telling; confidentiality; decision-making for the seriously ill patient; informed consent; consent and the law; paternalism; and the nature and role of hope in palliative care.

Module 3: Quality of Life, Death, and Dying

This module focuses on end-of-life issues and normally includes seminars on defining death; the significance of death; the sanctity and value of life; the idea of “quality of life”; withdrawing and withholding life-prolonging treatment; advance statements about treatment (“living wills”); and ethical and legal issues in euthanasia.

Module 4: Contemporary Issues in the Ethics of Cancer and Palliative Care

The content of this module varies from year to year to reflect current issues of particular concern in the field. In recent years it has included seminars on resource allocation; research ethics; special issues relating to the care of children; screening programmes; the role of religious belief in ethical

debate; and differing conceptions of palliative care.

Dissertation

The dissertation gives students a chance to undertake a more intensive piece of work (between 15000 and 20000 words) on a topic of interest to them. While working on the dissertation students will have a supervisor to provide support and advice during the writing process. Dissertation topics are chosen by the student themselves and must relate to an issue within the broad area of the ethics of cancer and palliative care.

Assessment

Each teaching block is followed by an assignment. For module 1 this is made up of three short written tasks, whilst for each of modules 2, 3 and 4 the assignment consists of a 4,000 word essay. All modules must be passed in order to proceed to the dissertation.

Entry Requirements

The course is open to all those with either a degree in a relevant subject, or appropriate professional qualifications and / or experience. Applications are welcome from people with a professional or other serious interest in the ethics of cancer and palliative care, including (but not limited to) doctors, nurses, health care managers, intercalating medical students, radiographers, chaplains, charity and voluntary workers, social workers, hospice directors, medical and pharmaceutical researchers, and health care educators.

Funding

In previous years a number of students on our courses have managed to obtain full or partial funding from their employers. The value of training in this area is increasingly recognised by employers, and the opportunity to undertake a detailed examination of a particular area in healthcare ethics could be very beneficial to the organisation.

Application Procedure

Details of application procedures are given at www.keele.ac.uk/postgraduate, where you will also find the online application form and our Postgraduate Prospectus. If you have any difficulties please contact the Postgraduate Office via email, telephone or post:

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