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Press release

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Good quality palliative care is not available to everyone who needs it

Access to good palliative care in Scotland needs to improve and it must be more consistently provided for the thousands of people who need it each year.

An Audit Scotland report published today, *Review of palliative care services in Scotland*, looks at the provision of care for people with terminal illnesses. This care is provided both by 'generalists' such as GPs, hospital doctors, district nurses, care workers, and friends and families, and by 'specialists' such as hospice staff and specialist palliative care teams.

The report says most people are cared for by generalist staff, but patients with any condition who need care from specialist services should be able to get this. Currently, specialist care mainly focuses on people with cancer.

The availability of specialist care also varies significantly across Scotland and different areas have different models. For example, the number of specialist staff per 100,000 people ranges from 4.1 in NHS Ayrshire and Arran to 7.3 in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and 11.2 in NHS Highland.

Caroline Gardner, the Deputy Auditor General for Scotland, said: 'More than 55,000 people die in Scotland each year. Palliative care should be an integral part of the support given to patients and their families and carers during the last months, days and hours of their lives.'

'In many areas of Scotland the voluntary sector and the health service provide excellent and much appreciated care. But access to good quality palliative care varies across the country. The Scottish Government needs to address these issues in the palliative care action plan it is due to publish this October.'

Generalists who are involved in palliative care need the support and guidance of specialists so that they can recognise palliative care needs and improve the quality of care they give to patients and their families. But good practice guidelines for palliative care are not being applied everywhere that care is provided.

The report finds that the total cost of providing palliative care is unknown. About £59 million was spent on specialist palliative care in 2006/07, and almost half of this money came from the voluntary sector. The cost of generalist care is unclear but it is a significant part of the work of many staff in health and social care.

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Notes to editors

1. Palliative care is defined by the World Health Organisation as: "The active total care of patients whose disease is not responsive to curative treatment. Control of pain, of other symptoms and of psychological, social and spiritual problems is paramount. The goal of palliative care is achievement of the best quality of life for patients and their families." Palliative care can start from the point of diagnosis of a life-limiting condition and may continue through to bereavement support offered to families after someone has died.
2. Towards the end of life people may experience symptoms such as pain, breathlessness, fatigue, anxiety, depression and nausea. Palliative care can involve: symptom control; psychological support; physiotherapy and complementary therapies; and emotional support for patients and their families.
3. As part of informing this study, Audit Scotland interviewed 72 patients and heard from almost 1,000 bereaved families and informal carers about their views and experiences of palliative care. We have produced separate reports on their responses, which can be obtained from Audit Scotland through our media office on the phone numbers listed above.

4. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 can be found on Audit Scotland's website www.audit-scotland.gov.uk
5. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland.
6. The Auditor General is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Government and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament.