

**Farkındalık ve Tutum Değişikliği Potansiyeli Olarak Sınıf Dışı Akran Etkileşimi  
Peer Interaction Outside the Classroom as a Potential for Awareness and Attitude****Şahizer Eraydın<sup>1</sup>, Mustafa Süren<sup>2</sup>, Rıza Çıtıl<sup>3</sup>,  
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**Özet**

**Amaç:** Araştırma, hemşirelik öğrencilerinde akran etkileşimlerinin palyatif bakım bilinci, tutum ve davranışlarına etkisini değerlendirmek amacıyla yapılmıştır.

**Gereç ve Yöntemler:** Araştırmanın evrenini 2015-2016 eğitim-öğretim yılında bir üniversitenin Hemşirelik Bölümü'nde öğrenim gören hemşirelik öğrencileri oluşturmuştur. Bir dönem önce 54 hemşirelik öğrencisi ilk kez "Palyatif Bakım Hemşireliğine Giriş" seçmeli dersini aldı. Kursu ilk alan öğrencilerin akran paylaşımlarını ölçmek için 26 soruluk bir anket oluşturulmuştur. Anket formu tüm hemşirelik öğrencilerine yüz yüze görüşme yöntemi ile uygulanmıştır.

**Bulgular:** Yanıt oranı% 79.02 idi (n: 410 öğrenciden 324'ü). 218 öğrenci palyatif bakım konseptini duydu. Öğrencilerin % 44,9'u (n=80) palyatif bakım dersini almış olan öğrencilerle akran etkileşimi olduğunu ve öğrencilerin % 28,6'sı (n=51) etkileşimin palyatif bakım konularından oluştuğunu belirtmiştir. Arkadaşları seçmeli palyatif bakım kursunu alan öğrencilerin% 64,6'sı bu alanda çalışmak istediklerini belirtirken, arkadaşları kursu almayan öğrencilerin sadece% 43,2'si aynı niyeti ifade etmiştir. Fark istatistiksel olarak anlamlıydı (p <0.05).

**Sonuç:** Akran etkileşiminin etkisi, hem palyatif bakım farkındalığını hem de bir profesyonel olarak çalışma niyetini oldukça güçlü olarak yansıtır. Akranlarla etkileşim, günümüzün aşırı yüklü müfredat ortamında palyatif bakım eğitiminde önemli bir araç olarak kullanılabilir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** palyatif bakım, hemşirelik eğitimi, akran etkileşimi, hemşirelik öğrencisi.

**Abstract**

**Aim:** The study was carried out to evaluate the effect of peer interactions on palliative care awareness, attitude and behavior in nursing students.

**Materials and Methods:** The population of the study was composed of nursing students studying in the Nursing Department of a university in the 2015-2016 academic year. A semester ago, 54 nursing students took “Introduction to Palliative Care Nursing” elective course for the first time. A questionnaire with 26 questions was created to measure the peer sharing of the students who took the course first. The questionnaire form was applied to all nursing students by face to face interview method. Data were collected and evaluated using appropriate statistical analysis.

**Result:** The response rate was 79.02% (n: 324 out of 410 students). 218 students heard about palliative care concept. 44.9 % (n=80) students had peer interaction with

palliative care course attendants and 28.6% students (n=51) claimed that interaction consisted of palliative care topics. 64.6% of the students whose friends had taken the elective palliative care course stated that they wanted to work in this field, while only 43.2% of the students whose friends had not taken the course expressed the same intention. The difference was statistically significant ( $p<0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** The impact of peer interaction reflected as both the awareness of palliative care and the intention to work as a professional is rather strong. The interaction with peers could be used as an important tool in palliative care education in today's over-whelmed curriculum setting.

**Key Words:** palliative care, nursing education, peer interaction, nursing student.

## Introduction

Palliative care education carries paramount importance in nursing students since nurses have a pivotal role in the care of patients with life-threatening diseases.<sup>1</sup> They are expected to give a multidimensional care to the patients and their families including physical, psychosocial, cultural, and spiritual aspects when they need.<sup>2</sup> It is a tremendously demanding task which requires knowledge, skill and appropriate behavior supposedly to be gained during their educations.<sup>3-5</sup>

The nursing curriculum should contain both theoretical and practical aspects of holistic approach to palliative care patients. However, current research has shown that there is an insufficiency of palliative care knowledge and skills among nursing students, newly graduated nurses, and working nurses.<sup>1,3,6</sup> Working nurses have stated that they haven't had adequate palliative care training. In addition, newly graduated nurses have reported a lack of confidence in this issue, saying they do not have sufficient skills for providing care for palliative care patients and their families.<sup>1,3,6-8</sup>

Recently palliative care education gained special interest in healthcare faculties throughout the world. In Turkey, since the palliative care units have been

recently established, a few nursing faculties included the palliative care in their undergraduate curriculum mostly as elective courses.<sup>8-11</sup> Peer interaction is an important in the education. The students convey their knowledge, attitudes, even prejudices about the lectures, instructors, and the school. The more organized form of peer interaction in education is called Peer-assisted learning which is defined as an educational activity which students who are not professional instructors but educated individuals carry out with their peers (similar characteristics such as age, educational status, social position, etc.) and which help students develop in terms of knowledge, attitude, and skills.<sup>12-15</sup>

Peer teaching occurs when a student transfers knowledge to his/her peer either inside or outside the classroom environment. In peer teaching, the social learning that emerges from peers' interaction with each other and their imitations of each other is utilized. In order for peer education to take place, there must be an information gap among participants. Thus, one side can approach the other as an instructor.<sup>16-19</sup> "Palliative care nursing" course has been taught as an elective course in our faculty since 2014. It is 28 hour course and the lectures were given by the multidisciplinary palliative care team including physicians, nurses, dietitian, psychologist, social worker, religious

scholar. Since palliative care is a new concept in Turkey, the students are reluctant to choose it as an elective among other familiar subjects. However, we aimed to reach as many students as to increase the awareness about the palliative care and gain a positive attitude. Therefore, we wanted to reveal the impact on awareness of palliative care and to find out how peer interaction affected the perception and attitude.

This study aimed to elaborate the influence of peer interaction on the awareness of palliative care by showing the quality and quantity of peer interaction between the students who took the palliative care course and the others who didn't.

**Research question:** Does peer interaction outside the classroom carry a potential for awareness and attitude change?

## Materials and Methods

The study was designed as analytical cross-sectional type. The study was held in the Nursing Department of Health Sciences Faculty, Gaziosmanpaşa University, Tokat. Before the commence of the study, approval of the Health Sciences Faculty of Gaziosmanpaşa University (registration number: 84543199-044 and date 11/11/2015-E.49097) was obtained. The verbal consent of the students was also

obtained before the administration of the questionnaire. The Helsinki Declaration was complied with in the research.

The faculty has 410 students distributed as 105 in the first grade, 102 in the second grade, 100 in the third grade, 103 in the fourth grade. The universe of the study consisted of all students who were undergraduate students cross-sectionally during the spring semester of 2016 academic year. No sampling selection procedure was employed; instead, the entire universe was targeted.

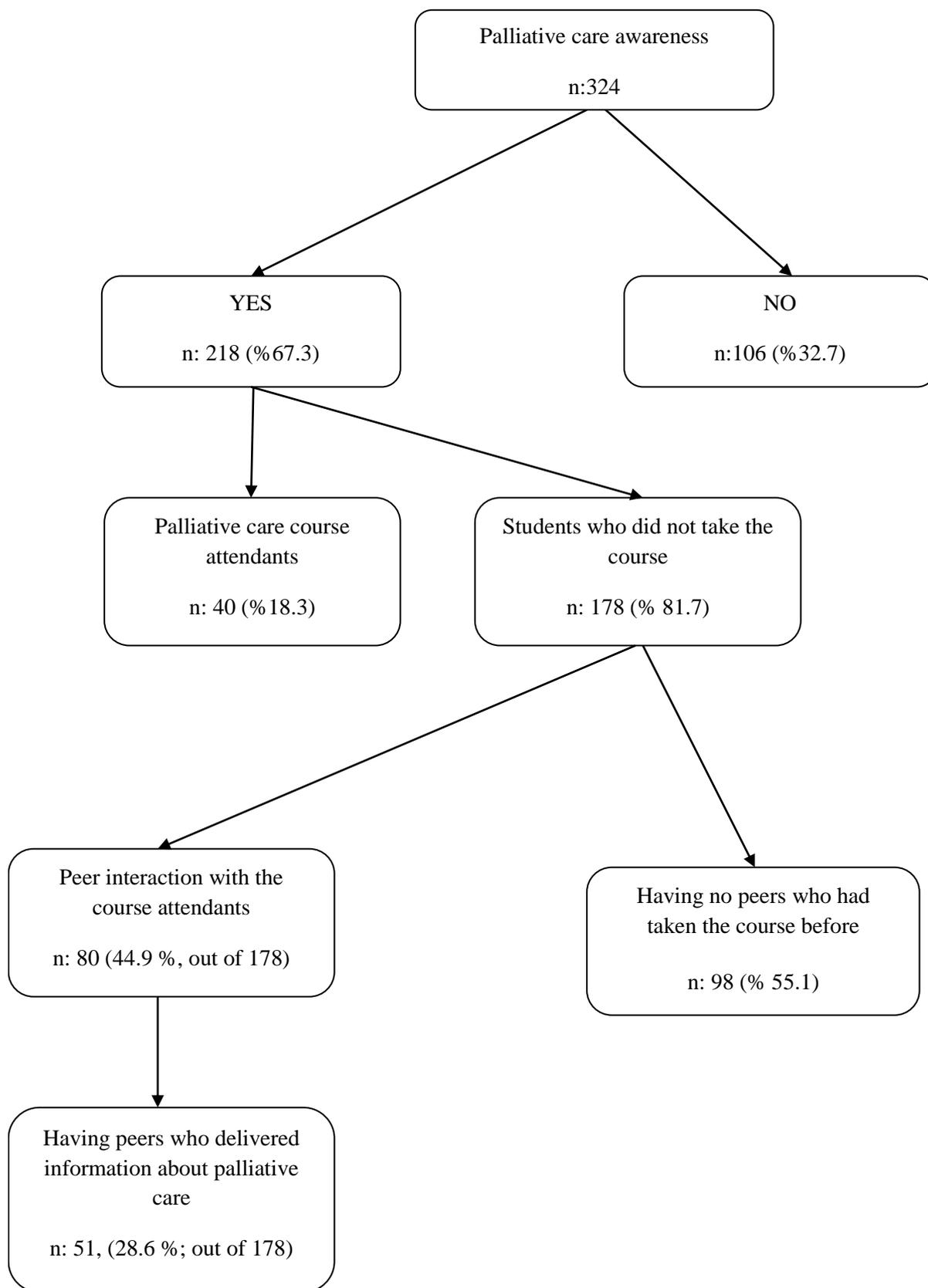
Palliative care was established initially as a study group in the university hospital in 2011. The study group consisted of 15-20 multidisciplinary professionals including physicians, nurses, dietitian, psychologist and social worker etc. The "Palliative care nursing" course commenced in 2015 as a two-hours/week elective course in the nursing. The course had a multidisciplinary format under the supervision of a nursing faculty member. The lectures were given by physicians, dietitians, social worker, and psychologist in accordance with the lecture topics. The lectures covered the main aspects of the palliative care such as the introduction, organization, first assessment of palliative patients, the role of palliative care nurse, general approach to symptoms, pain and pain management in cancer patients, palliative emergency cases, psychosocial

problems and communication, ethical issues, family education, spiritual and religious support, nutritional support and social services in palliative care.

A total of 54 students took the course in the spring semester of 2015. Data was collected using a questionnaire in the spring semester of 2016. The questionnaire was prepared through a series of meetings with the members of Palliative Care Study Group. First, the items to be addressed were generated by literature.<sup>4,16,17,20</sup> reviewing and brain-storming in the group. The items were discussed in detail and reduced to a minimum number. At the end, it consisted of three parts. The first part included items questioning the demographic characteristics of the students and whether the students were familiar with the term palliative care. The second

part contained items for students who heard about the term palliative care but had not taken the course, yet. It deeply surveyed about the nature of interaction between students who took the course and those who did not, such as the place and time of this interaction, and attitude and behavioral changes towards palliative care resulting from this interaction. The third part was for students who had already taken the course. Thereafter, the questions and their responses were formatted. A total of 25 questions were formatted in short, concise, and unbiased language for students. Responses were chosen in binary, responses in ordinal, responses in the nominal format. It was pre-tested in 10 students of the same age and educational level with the potential respondents.

FIGURE



Data was collected by a single researcher collectively in each grade student's classroom. The objective and target of the study were explained to the students by the researcher and the questionnaires were administered to the participants in their classrooms collectively. The students were asked to complete the questionnaire before the start of the lecture. The completion of the forms took around 15-20 minutes for each group of students.

The data obtained from the study were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20 software package. Numbers (n) and percentages (%) were used for descriptive statistics and Chi-square test was employed for inter-group comparisons. The statistical significance level was taken as  $p < 0.05$ .

## Results

The student demographics and palliative care awareness: 324 of the total 410 students participated in the study (the response rate was 79.02%). The demographic features of the students and their awareness about palliative care was shown in Table 1. Figure 1 graphically summarizes the students' distribution with regard to the course attendance, the awareness of palliative care and the peer interaction. 32.7 % of the students (n:106) were not aware of palliative care concept. 218 students (n: 67.3%) claimed that they

heard about palliative care. Forty students (18.3 %, out of 218 students) were palliative care course attendants. 178 students have heard about palliative care without attending the course. Although 80 students (24.7%, out of 324 students) had at least one peer interaction with the students who have taken the course, only 51 students (80, out of) received information about the palliative care from their peers ( Table 1).

Interactions between students who took the palliative care course and those who did not: Only 40 out of 54 students (74.07 %) who took the Palliative Care Nursing elective course filled the questionnaire. 97.5 % of the students (n:39) stated that they shared the information delivered in the course with other students who had not taken the course. Additionally, 37 students (92.5 %) shared their view about palliative care with people outside the school. The main motive to share their information is that they were influenced by the course (68.4%), The details of the study is depicted in Table 2.

The main place for exchanging their view with peers is the classroom with 55% (n:28). The canteen (n:13) and dormitory (n: 10) were other places where the discussions took place. The main exchanged topic were about nursing care (53%), problems in palliative patients

(49%) and terminal period care(45.1%). 30 inadequate (Table 3).  
students (58.8%) found these sharings

**Table 1. The views and knowledge of the students on palliative care who were familiar with the palliative care concept**

		N	%
Where did you hear about the concept of palliative care? * (n=218)	From the courses in the curriculum	151	69.3
	From the healthcare personnel	82	37.6
	From peers	83	38.1
	From peers who had taken the palliative course before	53	24.3
	From the Internet	45	20.6
	Other (Social media, TV, other)	34	15
Have you encountered terminal period patients in clinical practices? (n=218)	Yes	178	81.65
	No	40	18.35
The frequency of encountering patients receiving palliative care during the internship in clinical practices (n:178)	Rarely during the internship	75	51,7
	Occasionally during the internship	59	40.7
	Often during the internship	9	6.7
The state of wanting to take the palliative care nursing elective course by students who haven't taken this course yet (n=178)	Yes	148	83.1
	No	30	16.9
The state of wanting to participate in activities about palliative care (n=178)	Yes	141	81.4
	No	37	18.6
The state of wanting to work in palliative care field after graduation (n=178)	Yes	89	53.3
	No	78	46.7

\* Multiple options were marked.

**Table 2.** The views of the students who had taken the palliative course previously on the course (n=40)

		N	%
The state of sharing your views about the course with other students who hadn't taken the course previously	Yes	39	97.5
	No	1	2.5
The reason for sharing about the course *	My friends asked me about it	14	35.9
	I liked the course	19	50.0
	I was influenced by the course	26	68.4
	Help them to get informed about it	24	60.2
	Other	3	7.9
Sharing information about palliative care with people outside school	Yes	37	92.5
	No	3	7.5
People who shared information with*	My family	26	70.3
	My friends from other departments at the university	27	73.0
	The healthcare team in the clinical setting	9	24.3
Considering the elective "palliative care nursing" course satisfactory	Yes	27	67.5
	No	5	12.5
	Partly	8	20.0
"The most interesting and appealing thing in the "palliative care" course	Objectives of the course	9	25.0
	Pain and pain management	7	19.5
	Patient care and hospice	12	33.3
	Nursing care	6	16.6
Do you believe the information received in palliative care course can be used in daily life?	Yes	39	97.5
	No	1	2.5

\*Multiple options were marked.

**Table 3.** The sharings of the students who had friends that had taken the palliative care nursing course previously.

		N	%
<b>Did your friends who had taken the “palliative care nursing course” share their knowledge about the course with you? (n=80)</b>	Yes	51	60.7
	No	29	36.3
<b>Where did they make their sharings?*</b>	Classroom	28	55.0
	Canteen	13	25.5
	Dormitory	10	19.6
	School	7	13.7
	Can't remember	5	9.8
	Other (cafeteria, social media, other)	7	13.7
<b>What topics did the students share?*</b>	Palliative care team	15	29.4
	Palliative care patients and their symptoms	16	31.4
	Ethical issues in palliative care	14	27.5
	Palliative emergency cases	6	11.8
	Nursing care of the palliative patient	27	53.0
	Terminal period care	23	45.1
	Problems in palliative patient	25	49.0
	General course of the lesson	18	35.3
The approaches of the instructors	17	33.3	
<b>Do you think the information on palliative care that you received from your friends was satisfactory?</b>	Yes	21	41.2
	No	30	58.8

\*Multiple options were marked.

*The effect of peer interaction on palliative care-related attitudes:* 90% of the students who had peer interaction about palliative care wanted to take the upcoming palliative care elective course, students (86%) wanted to participate in a voluntary palliative care activity and that 65% of the students wanted to work in the palliative care field after graduation. In our study, it was found that the rate of wanting to take the palliative care course and

wanting to work in the palliative care field after graduation was significantly higher in students who had friends who had taken the palliative care course previously compared to those who did not have such friends ( $p < 0.05$ ; Tablo 4). The demographic characteristics of the students did not yield any significant difference between students who took the “palliative care nursing” elective course and those who did not take it ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 4.** The future plans of students who had friends that had taken the palliative care nursing course before

		Having friends who had taken the palliative care nursing course before				P
		Yes		No		
		N	%	n	%	
The state of wanting to participate in palliative care activities (n:167)	Yes	68	86.1	11	13.9	p=0.144
	No	68	77.3	20	22.7	
	Total	136	81.4	31	18.6	
The state of wanting to work in the palliative care field after graduation (n:167)	Yes	51	64.6	28	35.4	p=0.006
	No	38	43.2	50	56.8	
	Total	89	53.3	78	46.7	
The state of wanting to take the “Palliative care nursing” course (n:178)	Yes	72	90	76	77.6	p=0.027
	No	8	10	22	22.4	
	Total	80	44.9	98	55.1	

## Discussion

The study had some original findings showing that a quarter of students had peer interaction with palliative care course-attendants while only 63.7 % (51 out of 80 students) had discussed palliative care with their peers. However, this interaction was quite strong since the significant positive attitude towards palliative care among palliative care discussing group has been noticed. Since the study was designed to take part in the semester immediately after the course, the interaction could be attributed to the impact of student interaction.

The nearly one third of the students did not hear about palliative care concept and the majority of them was first year nursing students as it was expected. Since palliative care was recently established in Turkish Healthcare system, the newcoming

students were not aware of it. However, in our faculty many students (67.3 %) learned about palliative care through their courses and also during their clerkships in the hospital where a palliative care unit is located. “Palliative care nursing” course was initiated in the curriculum as an elective course in the nursing department of our university in the year 2014 with the increasing interest in palliative care all over the world.<sup>8-11,21</sup>

Among the students, the most shared topics regarding the palliative course were nursing care, patient problems, and terminal period care. However, the students did not find these sharings adequate. Naturally, information that is shared in free environments does not have a formal education nature. This information can be reflected in the form of awareness and behavioral changes, but it is clear that the information provided in these

environments is not sufficient for learning. For this reason, detailed educational information about the course should be provided to the students through the curriculum. Educational curricula should prepare students to do their jobs as future nurses. A nurse's perception and care of the palliative patient and the acquisition of these roles are gained during nursing education. The content of the curriculum should help students cope with future problems and prepare them for new roles<sup>1,9,21</sup>

In our study, the palliative care course-related opinions of the students who had taken the palliative care nursing course in the previous semester and participated in the study were also analyzed. Nearly all of the students who had taken the course shared their knowledge of the course with their friends in the nursing department. It was observed that the students who had taken the course had positive views about the lesson, they found the course satisfactory, and that they shared it with their close friends. With these sharings, their friends developed a positive view towards palliative care. It can be said that the positive thoughts about the course contributed to the peer interaction. In addition, most of these students who had taken the course shared their knowledge outside the school environment with their parents and students from other

departments. As a result, we can say that these sharings helped the palliative care concept and course become known. The presence of peers in the same environment resulted in a positive interaction between them.<sup>14,22</sup> Majority of the students helped the course reach its goals as understood from their statements that they wanted to use the information they had received in the course in their daily lives and that they could use their knowledge in professional areas after graduation.

Nearly all of the nursing students who had friends that had taken the palliative care elective course previously wanted to take the palliative care elective course. Most of these students also wanted to participate in palliative care activities and work in this area after they graduated. These findings indicated that the students who had taken this course before made positive contributions to their friends through peer interaction. The students who had taken the course before affected their friends' views statistically significantly and positively by transferring their own knowledge and views to their friends. The information provided by the students' peers may have increased student interest, curiosity, and sensitivity towards the course. It is evident that awareness of these sensitivities and carrying out activities for students will keep this interest fresh. Our

students' education can be promoted through peer interaction in palliative care.

The sharing among the students regarding the palliative care elective course mostly occurred in the classroom, canteen, and hallway. These areas are common to all students. It is important that these areas should be designed to attract the interest of not only nursing students but also of all university students regarding palliative care. The classes should be designed to be both remarkable and informative. We can predict that introducing palliative care via pictures and posters put up the walls of the communal spaces (canteen, classroom, corridor, dormitory etc.) will increase the awareness of other students in palliative care at the university.

It is important to share accurate information about the newly established palliative care concept. It know palliative care as treatment and care to extend the patient's life span.<sup>23</sup> We think this is due to the traditional care practices and the fact that the concept of palliative care has not been fully established, yet. We can say that the students consider palliative care as traditional terminal period care. At the same time, most of the students who participated in the study encountered terminal period patients in hospital practices. The students may have been affected by these practices because the terminal period care given at the hospital

clinics aim at treatment and extending life. Unfortunately, the students did not have much exposure to palliative care given by the healthcare team in clinical settings. This may have stemmed from the fact that the healthcare team's palliative care practices are new throughout the country. Studies carried out by Al-Kindi et al, (2014) and Turan et al, (2017) Miniksar et al, (2020) indicated that nurses and the healthcare team did not have adequate knowledge about palliative care.<sup>3,6,20,23</sup>

This results in failure to provide students an environment where they can put the theory into practice. However, the students who participated in the study knew the basic approaches of palliative care such as providing patients with psychosocial care and increasing quality of life. They may have learned these approaches from the courses in the curriculum or from their friends who had taken the related course previously. For this reason, the accuracy and consistency of the information shared among peers should be monitored by the palliative care team particularly in the lessons and efforts should be made to have the students receive accurate information.

### **Limitations of the study**

One of the limitations of our study was the small number of students taking the course due to the fact that it was the first year of

the course. It can be predicted that the interaction of a few learners will not be that effective. Moreover, the fact that palliative care is a new phenomenon in the country creates a lack of information. The lack of activities that facilitate communication between upper and lower grade students such as meeting programs and the inability to control the interactions among students can be seen as other limitations of our study.

### Conclusion

Our study indicated that a small number of learners created behavioral and attitudinal changes in many students markedly. The study also showed the power of peer-interaction in communication. Given that young adults interact with each other in every environment, it turns out that peer interaction is an important concept that needs to be studied more. In this regard, our study is original with respect to revealing the effects of peer interaction in the field of palliative care education. This method can also be used in other areas of healthcare professionals' education. Larger sampling groups are needed to investigate the impact of this interaction on students from other departments of the university (such as psychology, social services, theology, education, dietetics) which are interested in palliative care.

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