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Head and heart of the family doctor in end-of-life care

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Background & Aim: The Dutch College for General Practitioners developed a postgraduate educational course for GP's about Advanced Care Planning (ACP). ACP is a process in which a patient, in consultation with health care providers, family members and significant others, makes decisions about his/her future health care, in anticipation of becoming incapable of participating in medical treatment decisions. The course starts with an instruction on how to select patients who need ACP, followed by a training in ACP and doctor-patient communication about care demands in the end of life. The aims of the training are: doctors have knowledge about ethical and legal aspects of end-of-life care; they are capable in making well-considered decisions and develop a proactive attitude towards ACP. The training consists of two meetings in a small group, led by two trainers. The effects of the courses are systematically evaluated.

Method: in the workshop the techniques and skills in ACP will be demonstrated and discussed, the results of the evaluation will be presented, and the participants exchange their ideas on ACP and the value of the course.

Results: Participants are informed about the aims, procedure and conclusions of the programme. They have refined their ideas and views on ACP and the value of the course, and on the possibilities for adoption and implementation in their country.

Conclusions: End-of-life care is an essential task for the GP, and training in the concept of ACP, including the knowledge and communication skills needed, is recommended.