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Website:

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DOI:

10.4103/ijp.ijp_474_24

Inclusion of “palliative care pharmacology” as a new chapter in the pharmacology textbook for medical undergraduate students: A strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat analysis

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Abstract:

Palliative care is a multidisciplinary approach aimed at improving the quality of life (QoL) and alleviating sufferings of people with serious and terminal illnesses. The present health system understands that palliative and rehabilitative services offer care to patients when cure is not possible. The concept is relatively new for most Indian graduates due to little emphasis on palliative care in the medical curriculum in India. Although palliative care has been incorporated in Universal Health Coverage in India and now also in the new competency-based medical curriculum in various subjects, including pharmacology, by the National Medical Commission, it is seldom emphasized to medical undergraduates in a structured, separate chapter. Like many other countries, it largely lacks implementation due to a lack of information and emphasis in standard textbooks. Palliative care is considered to be part of the primary healthcare system, and our budding physicians are supposed to be empowered with the prescription skills in palliative care. In the Indian scenario, this is being adopted newly in the medical training of primary care with the new medical education system. Pharmacology plays an important role in understanding the use of palliative care medicines. Palliative care pharmacology includes the use of various medications that target specific symptoms or conditions, for example, opioids such as morphine, fentanyl, and oxycodone for severe pain, antiemetics to alleviate nausea and vomiting, and benzodiazepines to manage anxiety and agitation. Most of the drugs prescribed in palliative care are usually covered in pharmacology textbooks, but in a “piecemeal.” However, an explicit chapter on palliative care with the relevant pharmacology helps the young medicos to get sensitized to the drugs and acquire the requisite prescription skills early on the same go. “Strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat analysis” is a tool for strategic planning to assess the intrinsic and extrinsic factors, as well as the existing and upcoming potential of an initiative. Palliative care, which is relatively a new concept for MBBS teaching in India, is still at a primitive stage and needs more emphasis to provide definite advantages with the changing needs of society. Here, in a fresh perspective, through this fact-based analysis we looked at competitive position of ‘Pharmacology’ discipline to provide the early exposure of ‘palliative care’ to the MBBS students through a new chapter. We also explored its current relevance and future potential. In addition, we analyzed the internal and external factors influencing this approach, including its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Keywords:

MBBS, opioids, pain, palliative care, pharmacology, strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat

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How to cite this article: Chaturvedi A, Mukhopadhyay S, Raina RS, Kaur G. Inclusion of “palliative care pharmacology” as a new chapter in the pharmacology textbook for medical undergraduate students: A strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat analysis. Indian J Pharmacol 2026;58:3-10.

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Submitted: 02-Jun-2024

Revised: 24-Jul-2025

Accepted: 29-Oct-2025

Published: 07-Jan-2026