



Original Article

# Hospice palliative care article publications: An analysis of the Web of Science database from 1993 to 2013

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## Abstract

**Background:** Academic publications are important for developing a medical specialty or discipline and improvements of quality of care. As hospice palliative care medicine is a rapidly growing medical specialty in Taiwan, this study aimed to analyze the hospice palliative care-related publications from 1993 through 2013 both worldwide and in Taiwan, by using the Web of Science database.

**Methods:** Academic articles published with topics including “hospice”, “palliative care”, “end of life care”, and “terminal care” were retrieved and analyzed from the Web of Science database, which includes documents published in Science Citation Index-Expanded and Social Science Citation Indexed journals from 1993 to 2013. Compound annual growth rates (CAGRs) were calculated to evaluate the trends of publications.

**Results:** There were a total of 27,788 documents published worldwide during the years 1993 to 2013. The top five most prolific countries/areas with published documents were the United States (11,419 documents, 41.09%), England (3620 documents, 13.03%), Canada (2428 documents, 8.74%), Germany (1598 documents, 5.75%), and Australia (1580 documents, 5.69%). Three hundred and ten documents (1.12%) were published from Taiwan, which ranks second among Asian countries (after Japan, with 594 documents, 2.14%) and 16<sup>th</sup> in the world. During this 21-year period, the number of hospice palliative care-related article publications increased rapidly. The worldwide CAGR for hospice palliative care publications during 1993 through 2013 was 12.9%. As for Taiwan, the CAGR for publications during 1999 through 2013 was 19.4%. The majority of these documents were submitted from universities or hospitals affiliated to universities.

**Conclusion:** The number of hospice palliative care-related publications increased rapidly from 1993 to 2013 in the world and in Taiwan; however, the number of publications from Taiwan is still far below those published in several other countries. Further research is needed to identify and try to reduce the barriers to hospice palliative care research and publication in Taiwan.

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**Keywords:** end of life care; hospice palliative care; publications; terminal care; Web of Science

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the subject matter or materials discussed in this article.

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## 1. Introduction

Academic publications are important for developing a medical specialty or discipline. Peer-reviewed literature provides an evidence-based support for clinical practice and the knowledge base for quality clinical care.<sup>1,2</sup> Exploration of the bibliographic databases can not only examine the publication progression of a related medical specialty or discipline but also the publication patterns.<sup>3</sup>

Hospice palliative care entails multidisciplinary medical approaches aiming at relief of pain and distressing symptoms by identification, assessment, and treatment of pain, physical, psychosocial, and spiritual problems to support the best possible quality of life for patients with serious life-threatening illness, and their families.<sup>2,4</sup> The multidisciplinary approaches of hospice palliative care provided across different medical and nonmedical professions have built distinct and complex knowledge on this topic and led to various practices around the world.<sup>3</sup>

In Taiwan, hospice palliative medicine is a young medical discipline. From years of effort in the hospice palliative movement, there are increasing numbers of hospice palliative beds in hospitals,<sup>5</sup> and increasing utilization of hospital hospice bed and home hospice care in Taiwan.<sup>6</sup> Many professionals, including clinical hospice palliative care providers and researchers in schools, have published their clinical practice and research results; however, there is no study exploring the patterns and characteristics of these published articles in Taiwan and in other countries.

The Web of Science (WoS) is a research database officially inaugurated in 2004 by the Thomson Scientific and Health Care Corporation. The WoS database contains not only the affiliations of all authors, but also provides the citation numbers of published articles. The WoS provides access to the Thomson Reuter's multidisciplinary databases of bibliographic information such as the Science Citation Index Expanded (SCI-E), the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index, and the Journal Citation Report (JCR).<sup>7–9</sup> The WoS is a powerful web interface providing access to the citation databases. The aim of this study was to analyze the hospice palliative care research publications worldwide from 1993 to 2013 by searching the WoS database.

## 2. Methods

The WoS database was accessed through the Taipei Veterans General Hospital Library website on December 1, 2014. In the first stage, publications in the SCI-E and SSCI with titles containing “hospice”, “palliative care”, “end of life care”, or “terminal care” were identified. Then, we refined document types limited to articles, letters, reviews, proceedings papers, editorial materials, and notes. Thereafter, we obtained the numbers of publications from different countries/areas worldwide by years, institutes that published these documents, WoS subject categories, and journals that published these documents. In the second stage, we refined the countries to the

top publishing countries in Asia, including Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, China, and India.

Results from the first and second stages were expressed by descriptive analyses. Compound annual growth rates (CAGRs) were calculated both worldwide and in Taiwan using the formula:  $[(\text{article numbers in 2013}/\text{article numbers in 1993})^{1/\text{number of years}} - 1]$ .

This study was exempted from review by the Institutional Review Board because we obtained its data from the public open domain of the Taipei Veterans General Hospital Library website.

## 3. Results

Searching by document types from the WoS database including articles, letters, reviews, proceedings papers, editorial materials, and notes published in SCI-E and SSCI journals, we found a total of 27,788 published documents with topics of hospice or palliative care, or end-of-life care or terminal care, worldwide during the time frame 1993–2013. The top 10 most prolific countries/areas publishing documents were the United States (11,419 documents, 41.09%), England (3620 documents, 13.03%), Canada (2428 documents, 8.74%), Germany (1598 documents, 5.75%), Australia (1580 documents, 5.69%), the Netherlands (1119 documents, 4.03%), Italy (1038 documents, 3.74%), France (998 documents, 3.59%), Spain (795 documents, 2.86%), and Sweden (750 documents, 2.70%). Table 1 lists the 10 most prolific countries worldwide from 1993 to 2013. For document types, articles were the most common publication type (22,167 articles, 79.77%), followed by reviews (2730 review articles, 9.82%), editorial materials (1859 papers, 6.69%), proceeding paper (1172 papers, 4.22%), and letters (993 letters, 3.57%). During 1993 to 2013, Taiwan published 310 documents (1.12%) and ranked 16<sup>th</sup> worldwide. In Asia, the top five countries publishing documents on hospice palliative care were Japan (594 documents, 2.14%), Taiwan (310 documents, 1.12%), China (306 documents, 1.10%), South Korea (282 documents, 1.02%), and India (165 documents, 0.59%) (Table 2). For published document types from Taiwan, articles were the most common publication type (291 articles, 93.87%), followed by reviews (12 review articles, 3.87%), and proceeding papers (6 papers, 1.94%).

Table 1  
Top 10 most prolific countries publishing hospice palliative care-related articles, 1993 to 2013.

Country	Articles published	Percent (%)
USA	11,419	41.09
England	3620	13.03
Canada	2428	8.74
Germany	1598	5.75
Australia	1580	5.69
Netherlands	1119	4.03
Italy	1038	3.74
France	998	3.60
Spain	795	2.86
Sweden	750	2.70

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