The ‘public message’ of palliative care in the Spanish press

José Miguel Carrasco
MA Political Sciences & Sociology
PhD Preventive Medicine & Public Health

ATLANTES research programme: human dignity, advanced illness and palliative care
Coverage and development of specialist palliative care services across the World Health Organization European Region (2005–2012): Results from a European Association for Palliative Care Task Force survey of 53 Countries

Carlos Centeno¹,²,³, Thomas Lynch³,⁴, Eduardo Garralda¹,², José Miguel Carrasco¹,², Francisco Guillen-Grimal⁵,⁶ and David Clark³,⁷,⁸,⁹

• Less than 50% of the patients who need PC has access
• Early stages of development
• Low public awareness about PC
Main generator of public opinion ...

... Palliative Care appears in the news, and contributes to build its own image.

... DO THEY REFLECT REALITY?
What does the media say when speaking about PC?

Aim: To explore and to describe the circulating ideas and messages about PC in printed and digital media.
Looking at the dissemination and plurality in editorial lines criteria, eight national newspapers were selected:

**PRINTED**
- **EL PAÍS**
- **EL MUNDO**
- **LA VANGUARDIA**
- **ABC**

**DIGITAL**
- **El Confidencial**
- **lainformacion.com**
- **Libertad Digital**
- **Público.es**

The database that gathers all national printed press.

**Web search**

- Time framework: 2009 - 2014
- Printed and on-line editions
- National, autonomic/regional and local editions
Multidisciplinary team: Palliative care, communication, philosophy, linguistics, sociology, public health...

1) Data extraction questionnaire: Characterisation and descriptive quantitative analysis of the news

2) Qualitative content analysis of the news
PRINTED PRESS: 262 articles

- El Mundo: 24
- La Vanguardia: 38
- El País: 65
- ABC: 135

On-line edition: 97 articles

- El Mundo.es: 57
- LaVanguardia.com: 40

DIGITAL MEDIA: 268 articles

- Elconfidencial.com: 6
- Libertaddigital.com: 18
- Público.es: 41
- Lainformación.com: 203
64% related with death, suffering, pain, terminal illness
“In March the government plans to approve a ‘law on dignified death’. (...) Jovell (President of the Spanish Patients’ Forum) criticised the move, stating that ‘if this new law is not going to refer to euthanasia, then it will be pointless, since the National Palliative Care Plan already outlines most of the rights of terminally ill patients’.”

(Title: Government announces law on dignified death; Newspaper: Elmundo.es; Date: 19/11/2010)
“If you screw up, you’ve simply followed protocol and it doesn’t matter. The protocol contains atrocities, like when a patient is not profitable for a hospital, he must be sentenced to palliative care (...)”

(Title: El recuadro, Antonio Burgos; Newspaper: ABC; Date: 31/05/2009)
"Almeria FC entered into the Intensive Care Unit on Saturday. It has worsened and has gone to the Palliative Care Unit”

(Title: El Almería no levanta cabeza; Newspaper: El Mundo; Date: 4/03/2011)
QUALITATIVE RESULTS:

- PC activity is scarcely approached as holistic care. *Message focusing on the death process and little is referenced to the benefits for patients and relatives*

- **Controversial cases** as “journalistic hooks”

- **Politicization of information.** *Instrumentalist resource to approach aspects related to health management and context/political debate*

- Linked to **social debate issues.** *Euthanasia, law of dignified death, etc.*
The presence of **PC in the media** does **not guarantee** the diffusion of **positive messages** related to the **benefits** it can offer to patients, those around them and the general population given its relevance **to addressing an emerging public health problem**.

Ideologically and politically charged **messages** linked to news stories and social debate **can overshadow** those that reflect the reality of care or that have an informative purpose.
It is feasible to design actions aimed at launching messages that help building a positive image of PC, promoting its development and implementation!!
On behalf of ATLANTES team...

Many thanks for your attention!

José Miguel Carrasco
jmccarrascog@unav.es
@jmccarrascog

@AtlantesPC
Atlantes Research Programme