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Bollig, Georg; Schmidt, Marina; Hornke, Ingmar; Knopf, Boris

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“People want to talk about death and dying” - experiences from the implementation of Last Aid Courses in Germany

Bollig G1,2, Schmidt M3, Hornke I1, Knopf B1
1Palliative Care Team, Medical Department Sønderborg/Tønder, South Jutland Hospital, Sønderborg, Denmark
2Palliative Care research group, Medical Research Unit, Institute of Regional Health Research, University of Southern Denmark
3Letzte Hilfe Deutschland gUG, Schleswig, Germany
georg.bollig@rsyd.dk

Aims:
The concept of Last Aid courses for the public was first described by Bollig in 2008. Last Aid courses aim at introducing the public to palliative care and to empower citizens to participate in the provision of end-of-life care at home. The feasibility and acceptance of such courses have been shown after starting pilot courses in Norway, Germany and Denmark in the years 2014 and 2015. The main goal of the current project was to implement Last Aid courses in different German regions and to educate instructors.

Methods:
People with practical experience from the field of palliative care and different backgrounds were educated as Last Aid course instructors during a one day instructor course. Potential instructors had to show their ability to teach the public during the course by giving a trial lecture.

Results:
Within the period from January 2015 to September 2018 750 instructors have been educated and more than 6000 people have participated in Last Aid courses in Germany. Most participants appreciate the course, its content and discussion death and dying with others. In 2015 the concept was awarded by the German Association for Palliative Medicine. A scientific evaluation of the questionnaires of more than 5000 participants is ongoing, a first German Last Aid symposium was held in 2017 and the second held in October 2018. In October 2019 the 3rd German Last Aid Symposium will be held in Germany. An instructor handbook for the course is available in German and shall be translated to English soon. At present more than 10000 citizens have participated in Last Aid courses for the public and more than 1200 instructors have been educated.

Conclusions:
Within three years the Last Aid courses in Germany have been transformed from being a pilot project to a well-known educational concept for palliative care and end-of-life care for the public. We provide a stage for education and discussion of palliative care using everyday language where people experience that talking about death, dying and end-of-life care does not hurt. Citizens really appreciate the offer and Last Aid courses are offered in many cities in Germany. In order to meet the great demand for Last Aid instructor courses an own non-governmental organization has been established under the name of “Letzte Hilfe Deutschland”.

More info available from our www.letztehilfe.info and www.lastaid.info

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