



Nordic Specialist Course in Palliative Medicine

11th Nordic Specialist Course in Palliative Medicine, 2023-2025

This course is a joint venture between the Associations for Palliative Medicine in the Nordic countries for a theoretical specialist training course in 6 modules.

Background

During the last decades, an increasing awareness of the need for a defined area of medicine to take care of patients with advanced, life-threatening disease has emerged in all the Nordic countries. Official reports have been published that give recommendations for the establishment of specialist palliative care services nation-wide, and an increasing number of palliative care programs are being set up. Palliative medicine has been approved as a formal competence field in Finland (2007), Norway (2011) and Denmark (2013). In Norway, it is being planned as a medical specialty. Sweden (2015) and Iceland (2017) both have palliative medicine as an add-on-specialty. However, despite these advances there is still a considerable shortness of physicians with experience and education in this field of medicine, and we are facing the situation that new palliative care units and programs might be established without the appropriate medical staffing. This situation, therefore, presents a need to educate doctors in the Nordic countries in palliative medicine at a specialist level.

The Nordic Specialist Course in Palliative Medicine was created in 2001-2002, and the first course started in October 2003. Since then, a new course has started every second year. The 10th course will end in April 2023. Due to the great interest in the course and the ongoing need for more specialists in palliative medicine, an 11th and last course will start in September 2023. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Norway will take part in this last course.

The task force initially planning the course decided to use the British Curriculum in Palliative Medicine, level C, (1) as the basis for the course content, as all other palliative medicine curricula more or less were based on this. Attention was also paid to the Swedish Curriculum (2). Since the first course, the course content has been constantly evolving based on developments in the field of palliative medicine, revised curricula and recommendations for education in palliative medicine (3-6), and feedback from course participants and teachers (7).



Norwegian Association for
Palliative Medicine



Finnish Association for
Palliative Medicine



DSPAM
Dansk Selskab for Palliativ Medicin

Danish Association for
Palliative Medicine



Samtök um líknandi meðferð

Icelandic Association for
Palliative Care



The present course

The plan for the 11th course is presented as learning outcomes and related course content, in line with modern educational theory and guidelines.

The course is aimed at doctors in the forefront of palliative medicine, who will play an important part in developing the field in their countries. Applicants must have specialist approval in a clinical specialty (see national application forms for specifications), be working in palliative care, intend to continue working in palliative care, and must present a time line for how they plan to obtain the highest possible recognition in palliative medicine in their country (formal competence field or add-on specialty).

The Nordic Specialist Course is a theoretical course giving a deepened understanding of the different topics that together compose the field of palliative medicine. The course is not intended to deliver a complete cookbook on 'how to do', but rather provide an expanded framework to stimulate the participants to independently take a closer look at details. This structure presupposes a high degree of activity and responsibility from the participants, including studies of the course literature, articles, and assignments between the modules. Research is regarded an important part of specialist training, and a limited research project is included in the course.

Overall goals for the course and corresponding clinical training

After completing the course and the clinical training, the participant

1. identifies as a palliative care physician
2. has acquired the competency to work as a consultant in a specialist palliative care setting
3. is able to critically reflect on own practice

Course Content 2023-2025

The course is planned for face-to-face modules. Although most unwillingly, this plan may have to be subject to changes due to the uncertainties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences.

MODULE 1 – 25-29 September 2023, Trondheim, Norway

A Introduction to palliative medicine	
Learning outcome:	The participant explains the characteristics, advantages and limitations of palliative medicine.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concepts and definitions• Core values
B Introduction to course project	
Learning outcome:	The participant plans a course project.



Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of the development and present challenges in palliative care research • Introduction to qualitative and quantitative research methods • Research ethics • Literature searches and critical reading • How to write a protocol • Planning of own project
C Symptom management in palliative care, with special reference to cancer	
Learning outcome:	The participant identifies, assesses and manages symptoms in patients with palliative care needs.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symptom identification and assessment, including in the cognitively impaired • Assessment tools • Management of common symptoms and conditions • Oncological treatment modalities in palliative care • Surgical palliative care interventions

MODULE 2 – 5-9 February 2024, Tampere, Finland

A The imminently dying	
Learning outcomes:	The participant recognizes a dying patient, makes appropriate decisions concerning the care and manages symptoms. Moreover, the participant has the confidence to accompany the dying patient and the relatives, being aware of her/his own limitations.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The dying process: signs and symptoms, pharmacological management • Ethical dilemmas (e.g., hydration, nutrition, withdrawing/withholding treatment) • Spirituality and existential issues • Care for the relatives and carers • Coping with emotional stress in yourself and in your team
B Audit	
Learning outcome:	The participant is able to perform a clinical audit.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The principles and practice of different types of audits • Exercises on the audit cycle • Real-life examples of audit in palliative care settings



MODULE 3 – 15-19 April 2024, Elsinore, Denmark

A Communication	
Learning outcome:	The participant communicates efficiently and empathetically with patients, relatives and health care professionals.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to role plays • Training of communication skills of increasing difficulty, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Getting a good start ○ Agenda setting ○ How to elicit the patient's perspective ○ Track emotional and cognitive data ○ Articulate empathy ○ Checking patient preference concerning information ○ How to normalize the patient's feelings and thoughts ○ How to summarize ○ Talking about serious news ○ Talking about transition to end-of-life care ○ Talking about dying
B Ethics	
Learning outcome:	The participant identifies, analyses and manages ethical dilemmas in palliative care.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics viewed as a critical reflection on human agency: meta-ethics, normative ethics and professional ethics • Ethics as an art that translates personal convictions into action: Virtues in medical practice • Ethics as a set of core values: professional codes of ethics • The nature of the patient-physician relationship • Medical anthropology of palliative care • Value and communication exercises
C Teamwork	
Learning outcomes:	<p>The participant understands the difference between a group and a team.</p> <p>The participant reflects on her / his role in the interdisciplinary team and contributes to the development of the team.</p>
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining groups and different types of teams • Teaming as concept • Team development • Accountability in teams • Handling team conflicts
D Palliative care in frail elderly and in patients with dementia:	
Learning outcome:	The participant identifies, assesses and manages symptoms and palliative care needs in frail elderly and patients with dementia.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different types of dementias and their central characteristics • Ethical issues



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task-centred versus person-centred care • Advance care planning • Management of behavioural, psychiatric and somatic symptoms
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MODULE 4 – 23-27 September 2024, Bergen, Norway

A Decision-making	
Learning outcome:	The participant applies relevant principles and regulations for decision-making in patients with and without decision-making capacity.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principles and national regulations • Decision-making in patients with and without decision-making capacity • Advance care planning
B Emergencies	
Learning outcome:	The participant identifies, analyses and manages emergencies in palliative medicine.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergencies in palliative medicine • Palliative orthopaedic surgery
C Complementary and alternative treatments	
Learning outcomes:	<p>The participant explains the difference between alternative and complementary treatments and the laws and regulations regarding their use.</p> <p>The participant communicates about the use of complementary and alternative treatments with her/his patient and reflects on her/his own attitude to these treatment modalities.</p>
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concepts, definitions, epidemiology • Legal aspects • Examples of common practice, effects and side effects • Useful web-resources • Communication about these modalities and reflection on own attitudes
D Organisation of palliative care in the Nordic Countries	
Learning outcome:	The participant explains the organisation of palliative care in her/his country and her/his place in the organisation.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation of palliative care in the Nordic countries
E Teaching and learning	
Learning outcomes:	<p>The participant describes factors promoting learning and applies them to own teaching.</p> <p>The participant is able to plan a learning session.</p>
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning theory • Factors to consider when planning a learning session. Learning outcomes



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative learning structures • Planning a learning session • Presentation techniques. Practice session • Evaluation of teaching and learning
F Wound care	
Learning outcome:	The participant makes a care plan for a patient with a non-healing wound.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic assessment and treatment options for the patient with a non-healing wound • Making a care plan

MODULE 5 – 27-31 January 2025, Elsinore, Denmark

A Communication	
Learning outcome:	The participant communicates efficiently and empathetically with patients, relatives and health care professionals.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As in Module 2, but with increasing difficulty
B Pain	
Learning outcome:	The participant assesses, evaluates and treats different types of pain.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classification and assessment of pain • Drug treatment principles • Invasive techniques • Radiotherapy and bisphosphonates • Non-pharmacological pain treatment • Strategies in difficult pain management including palliative sedation

MODULE 6 – 5-9 May 2025, Stockholm, Sweden

A Management, organisation	
Learning outcome:	The participant describes how to set up a palliative care program.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different organisational models for palliative care programs • Management • Differentiation between clinical and management issues • International organisations • Networking • Clinical guidelines
B Palliative care in end-stage organ failure and progressive neurological conditions	
Learning outcome:	The participant identifies, assesses and manages symptoms and palliative care needs in patients with end-stage organ failure and progressive neurological conditions.



Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Congestive heart failure• Chronic progressive pulmonary diseases• End-stage renal and hepatic diseases• ALS and other progressive, neurological diseases.
C Introduction to pediatric palliative care	
Learning outcome:	The participant recognizes the special aspects concerning palliative care in children.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overview of pediatric specialist palliative care
D Course project	
Learning outcome:	The participant has carried out a course project and presents the results orally and in a written abstract, both in English.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation of own project• Evaluation and feedback (colleagues and teachers)
E Examination and course evaluation	
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Three-hour written, unseen exam• Oral and written course evaluation



References

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2. Svensk läroplan i palliativ medicin. Svensk Förening för Palliativ Medicin, 2001.
3. Recommendations of the European Association for Palliative Care for the development of postgraduate Curricula Leading to Certification in Palliative Medicine. Report of the EAPC Task Force on Medical Education. EAPC 2009.
4. Specialty Training Curriculum for Palliative Medicine. London: Joint Royal Colleges of Physicians Training Board, 2010, amended 2014.
5. Landzaat LH, Barnett MD, Buckholz GT et al. Development of Entrustable Professional Activities for Hospice and Palliative Medicine Fellowship Training in the United States. J Pain Symptom Manage 2017; 54(4):609-16.
6. Läkarnas specialiseringstjänstgöring. Målbeskrivningar 2015. Socialstyrelsen, Sverige, 2015. <https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/globalassets/sharepoint-dokument/artikelkatalog/ovrigt/2015-4-5.pdf>
7. Sigurdardottir V, Edenbrandt C-M, Hirvonen O, Jespersen BA, Haugen DF. Nordic Specialist Course in Palliative Medicine: Evaluation and impact on the development of palliative medicine in the Nordic countries: A survey among participants from seven courses 2003-2017. J Palliat Med 2021; 24(12):1858-62.

Practical information

Course secretariat

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Course web site

www.nscpm.org



Entry requirements and selection of participants

The course is planned for a total of 38 participants. Applicants should have completed specialist training in a recognized medical specialty and possess knowledge and skills corresponding to level B of the palliative medicine curriculum (Ref. 1-2).

The national associations will consider and nominate participants among the applicants from their respective countries. The Steering Committee makes the final selection. Applicants will be notified May 2023.

Economy

The fee for each of the six course modules will be Euro 1100 (total course fee: Euro 6600). A deposit of Euro 1100 should be effected no later than 30 days after the notification of a successful application, and each module should be paid in advance.

Costs for travel and accommodation must be added.

Every participant is responsible for funding own course expenses. At the time of application, the applicant should ideally have obtained permission and provide evidence of guaranteed payment of the course costs, or be able to adequately demonstrate how the course will be financed.

Duration and organisation of training

The duration of specialist training in Palliative Medicine is 2-2.5 years, including the 6 modules of the Nordic Specialist Course in Palliative Medicine and clinical training. The duration of clinical training will differ between the Nordic countries, but will include work in specialist palliative care units or teams where the full range of services is provided in different settings, e.g., in-patient care, day care, home care, bereavement services. The program to which the participant is appointed will have named consultant trainers (educational supervisors) for each element of the program.

Research project

A limited research project is included in the course. Each course participant needs to find a tutor to assist on the project. The project may be quantitative or qualitative, in the form of a survey, an audit, development of a clinical guideline, or conducting a literature review. The task will be introduced in the first module and attended to in every module, with special emphasis on Modules 4 and 5 and presentation of projects orally and by a written abstract on Module 6. Participants already having an on-going project may use this, provided it is their own work (not more than two candidates working together).

Course participants need to be aware of the time and effort required to complete the project.

Assignments and exam

An assignment will be given at the end of each module and must be handed in, at the latest, 4 weeks after the module. The assignments will be graded: Pass/Not pass.

A final evaluation of each participant and exam will be performed at the end of the course.

Participants will receive a written proof (diploma) that they have passed the course.

To obtain this document, the exam, all assignments and the course project must be passed, and the participant must have been present at least 90% of the course.



Course evaluation

Each module will be consecutively evaluated by the participants and the Steering Committee. A final evaluation will be performed at the end of the course.

Course Steering Committee

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