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PhD in Social Health Sciences  
2021-2022

INVITATION to the Public defence of

**Mariëtte N. VERKISSEN**

To obtain the academic degree of

**DOCTOR OF SOCIAL HEALTH SCIENCES**

**End-of-life care in advanced cancer:  
an international challenge**

The defence will take place on

**Wednesday, 26 January 2022 at 6 p.m.**

In Auditorium Piet Brouwer

Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, Laarbeeklaan 103, 1090 Brussel

**ADMITTANCE:** due to Covid restrictions, please contact the PhD candidate if you want to attend the public defence in person.

The public defence can also be followed online, accessible through the following link:

[https://gf.vub.ac.be/redirects/PhD\\_defense\\_Mariëtte\\_Verkissen.php](https://gf.vub.ac.be/redirects/PhD_defense_Mariëtte_Verkissen.php)

## Summary of the dissertation

Due to ageing and the progress made in cancer treatment over the past few decades, people are living longer after being diagnosed with cancer, even those with cancer in an advanced stage. During their cancer journey, usually characterized by a slow but steady decline over a period of many months or years, these individuals have to cope with continuing challenges in setting and shifting personal goals and in planning their care to achieve these goals. Effective symptom management and communication throughout the illness trajectory and towards the end of life are foundational skills that healthcare providers need in order to help patients with advanced-stage illness live as well and comfortably as possible.

Advanced cancer is a big societal challenge across many nations and regions. This dissertation aims to contribute to a more comprehensive picture of the care delivered to cancer patients near the end of life, which could assist European policy makers and practitioners in establishing priorities to improve the quality of care for this patient population. The dissertation is divided in three parts. The first part describes patient-reported emotional and physical functioning, symptom intensity and quality of life, and how these outcomes vary across European countries and over time. The second part describes trends in general practitioner-patient communication on end-of-life topics in primary care in Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain; and also describes how cancer patients and bereaved relatives of cancer patients evaluate information provision by different types of specialist palliative care services in Belgium. The third part describes the prevalence of end-of-life decisions across cancer types and characteristics of the preceding decision-making process in Belgium.

Based on the findings, the dissertation offers several important implications and recommendations for future research, practice and policy in relation to end-of-life care for advanced cancer patients.

## Curriculum Vitae

Mariëtte Verkissen (1986) has a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and a Master's degree in Medical Psychology from Tilburg University, the Netherlands. After completing her Master's degree, she joined the End-of-Life Care Research Group in 2013 to start her doctoral research at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. For several years, she has worked as an executive researcher of the Flemish part of the EU FP7-funded ACTION project, a large multi-center trial conducted among advanced cancer patients in six European countries. Alongside her responsibilities for ACTION, she has been exploring and analyzing secondary data from several other national and international research projects to study quality of life, symptom burden, communication and end-of-life care in people with advanced cancer. Mariëtte was supervised by Prof. Dr. Luc Deliens and Prof. Dr. Aline De Vleminck. The results reported and discussed in her dissertation were published in five international peer-reviewed journals and presented at a number of national and international conferences.