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Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) & Ghent University

PhD in Social Health Sciences
2014-2015

INVITATION to the Public defence of

Kim BEERNAERT

To obtain the academic degree of '**DOCTOR IN SOCIAL HEALTH SCIENCES**'

**Identifying and addressing palliative care needs
throughout the illness trajectory**

Wednesday 24 June 2015

Het Pand, Gent – zaal Rector Blancquaert, 16:30

How to reach: <http://www.ugent.be/het-pand/nl/bereikbaarheid>



Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Summary of the dissertation

The World Health Organization (WHO) has promoted palliative care as the preferred approach to care for people suffering from a chronic life-limiting (or life-threatening) illness. The WHO further states that this approach should be initiated early in the illness trajectory. However, in practice and in research emphasis is mainly put on specialist palliative care services (rather than early generalist palliative care approaches), on people affected by cancer (rather than other life-limiting illnesses that might be amenable to palliative care) and on advanced stages of the disease (instead of looking at possible benefits of palliative care for people at earlier phases).

It is of major importance to extend the currently available research of palliative care needs and care for patients with life-limiting illnesses throughout the disease course to develop a better understanding of these needs and care that can lead to better care and, consequently, better quality of life. To do this we used four robust research methods: 1) qualitative interviews and focus groups with patients, family physicians and community nurses, 2) a survey in cancer patients on their care needs, 3) a nationwide survey in family physicians on the care in the last three months of life delivered to their patients, and 4) a population-based physician survey on the use of specialist palliative care services. By using these methods, this dissertation gives insight into the palliative care needs of patients with cancer, COPD, heart failure and dementia from diagnosis onwards, the tasks and roles in recognizing and handling palliative needs by the family physician throughout the illness trajectory and the use (or lack thereof) of specialist palliative care services by people dying with chronic life-limiting illnesses.

The findings in this dissertation can be used as an important framework to support, promote and develop an integration of a palliative care approach early into the care continuum.

Curriculum Vitae

Kim Beernaert (°1986) is an experimental psychologist and junior researcher working at the End-of-Life Care Research Group of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) & Ghent University. She obtained her Master's degree in experimental and theoretical psychology in 2009 (UGent). After that she finished the specific teacher training (SLO) at Ghent University and worked as a teacher in high school. She started her scientific career on early palliative care in family practice in April 2011. Her study was part of the "Flanders study to improve End-of-Life Care and Evaluation Tools" (FLIECE project), which was supported by a grant from IWT (SBO IWT nr 100036). Today she still works as a researcher at the End-of-Life Care Research Group and is involved in a subsequent study of this PhD on early palliative care needs in people with cancer and in the study on the Care Programme for the Last days of Life for older people.