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Medische oncologie  
UZ Gent



PhD in Medical Sciences  
2016-2017

INVITATION to the Public defence of

**Melissa HORLAIT**

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

**Palliative care communication in oncology departments in Flanders, Belgium.**

**Wednesday 23 August 2017**

Auditorium **Piet Brouwer**, 17:00

Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, Laarbeeklaan 103, 1090 Brussel

How to reach the campus Jette:

<http://www.vub.ac.be/english/infoabout/campuses>

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## Summary of the dissertation

Palliative care is the active, total care for patients (and their relatives) whose disease is not responsive to curative treatment(s). Early initiated palliative care has the potential to improve the quality of life of patients and their relatives through timely identification of emerging needs and problems of physical, psychosocial and spiritual nature. Yet, for many cancer patients palliative care is initiated late in their disease course or even not at all. This dissertation starts from the assumption that open, compassionate and timely communication about palliative care with cancer patients will result in better and earlier implementation of palliative care. It aims to understand the barriers and facilitating factors in the communication on palliative care in medical oncology settings in hospitals in Belgium.

The dissertation learns that barriers to communicate are not mere individual but take form in a complex mix of individual factors, team factors, organizational factors and factors on the level of the health care system. It demonstrates the lack of training in adequate communication skills as well as the lack of palliative care training for medical oncologists. It also shows that multidisciplinary communication is a process over longer time in which different health care professionals in different team settings contribute cumulatively to the overall assessment of the oncological patient. The dissertation also puts forward that the introduction of financial incentives on health system level will not be effective if these incentives are not considered within the complex mix of factors affecting communication.

## Curriculum Vitae

Melissa Horlait was born on 6 April 1983 in Leuven, Belgium. She attended high school at Sint-Jan Berchmanscollege in Brussels where she graduated in Greek-Mathematics (2002). At the Vrije Universiteit Brussel she obtained her Master's degree in Clinical Psychology (2007). After her studies she started working as a psychologist at the St. Maria Ziekenhuis in Halle where she accompanied patients and their relatives to their end of life.

In 2013 she started her PhD at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in collaboration with the Ghent University Hospital.

Melissa is still working as a researcher at the Department of Health Sciences, Organisation, Policy and Social Inequalities in Health Care (OPIH) of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, where she continues to work on the topic of communication in health care.