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End of Life Care Research Group  
Department of Family Medicine and Chronic Care  
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PhD in Social Health Sciences

2014-2015

INVITATION to the Public Defence of

**Winne KO**To obtain the academic degree of '**DOCTOR IN SOCIAL HEALTH SCIENCES**'**Dying with Cancer:  
An International Perspective****Tuesday 8 September 2015**

Auditorium Pieter Brouwer, 17:00

Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, Laarbeeklaan 103, 1090 Brussel

How to reach the campus Jette:

<http://www.vub.ac.be/en/campus-jette>

Vrije Universiteit Brussel

## Summary of the dissertation

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death in many countries around the world. Palliative care has been developed traditionally within the cancer group as an approach to “improve the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problem associated with life-threatening illness” and palliative care aims at addressing the various needs of patients and their families in a multidisciplinary manner. This thesis aims to understand the provision of cancer palliative care across Europe in a input-process-output system. Two international databases and one Belgian database were used to deal with four challenges identified in contemporary cancer palliative care, namely cross-country cancer palliative care, care in the last months of life for cancer patients, place of death and preferences, and quality of life. The thesis is divided into three parts, on the care provided to cancer patients in the final months of life, preferences of place of death of cancer patients according to GPs, and place of death & quality of life of advanced lung cancer patients. The thesis found through a cross-country comparison (Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain) that the provision of palliative care to cancer patients, final transitions to place of death as well as the awareness of place of death preferences by GPs varied across these countries. Moreover, an international study of place of death revealed the differences of place of death between lung cancer and COPD patients, and some patterns were consistent across many countries. Finally, a Belgian study on the quality of life among advanced lung cancer patients informed us about the changes in individual patients’ quality of life which worth attention. Implications from this thesis include more routine assessments among cancer patients, timely communication about end-of-life preferences, a public health approach in monitoring palliative care and more future cross-national research using trials or mixed methods are needed.

## Curriculum Vitae

Winne Ko was born on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1987 in Hong Kong. She obtained her bachelor degree in Government and Public Administration from the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2010. Her internships and work experiences spanned from government, non-governmental organisations to businesses. Her graduation thesis was on the subject of Russian democracy. She started pursuing her master degree in Political Science at the Central European University in Budapest, Hungary. She completed her master thesis with a qualitative interview study on the tobacco control legislation of Hungary, from a human rights perspective. In 2011, she was recruited as a Marie Curie PhD Training Fellow for the EU FP-7 Project ‘EURO IMPACT’, the aim of the project is to develop a multi-disciplinary, multi-professional and inter-sectorial educational research framework in Europe aimed at monitoring and improving palliative care. She first started as a Junior Researcher at the National Cancer Institute in Genova, Italy, working with Monica Beccaro and Massimo Costantini. And subsequently she relocated to the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in Belgium to work under the supervision of Prof. Lieve Van den Block and Prof. Luc Deliens. At the moment, she splits her time between the research consultant work for the Association of European Cancer League for a European joint action- CANCON on cancer survivors and rehabilitation, and as an administrative assistant at Zoetis, a global animal health company.

Winne is married to Michael and they live in Hamme, East Flanders.