

# Call for palliative care to be adapted for severely ill Covid-19 patients

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The first time that palliative care has been examined in the light of the current global pandemic. Credit: Lancaster University

Emergency-style palliative care needs to be implemented to meet the needs of Covid-19 patients who wouldn't benefit from a ventilator say

researchers.

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The researchers describe the challenges of providing palliative care where resources are stretched and demand is high, based on their experiences at a hospital in Switzerland close to the Italian border where there are high rates of the illness.

Professor Nancy Preston, Co-Director of Lancaster University's International Observatory on End of Life Care said: "Many patients are too unwell to benefit from ventilation but still need their symptoms managing."

In a paper published in *The Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, the researchers explained how palliative care needs to adapt to an emergency style in order to help make the best decisions and support families.

Professor Preston said: "These people require a conservative approach to their treatment, one which provides maximum support for their physical, emotional and spiritual needs—this is where a recognition that palliative care is required is crucial".

The team based their recommendation on caring for severely ill patients with Covid-19 in the Swiss hospital where treatment plans have changed dramatically.

This is due to a range of factors including competition for palliative care drugs, which are also used in ICU, as well as healthcare workers untrained in palliative care being re-allocated from their own specialities to care for patients with Covid-19.

"It is emergency style palliative care because patients can deteriorate quickly and need a rapid response from their health care team. It is crucial that patients with a high [symptom](#) burden are assessed and treated quickly—the recommendations in this paper based on front line experience can make a difference. This approach is therefore being used across the hospital, and in emergency departments too."

"Palliative care teams, intensivists and internal medicine specialists all work side by side as [palliative care](#) is recognised to be at the forefront of this crisis, as it can offer symptom management, support to families and [spiritual care](#) in a timely manner."

**More information:** Fusi-Schmidhauser Tanja et al, Conservative management of Covid-19 patients – emergency palliative care in action, *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2020.03.030](#)

Provided by Lancaster University

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