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Place of Death and Palliative Care Access in Portuguese Dementia Patients: A Trend Analysis

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BACKGROUND

Dementia is a chronic, progressive condition with significant global prevalence and public health impact. Early integration of palliative care throughout the disease trajectory has shown benefits, particularly in facilitating advanced care planning and aligning end-of-life care with individual preferences.[1-3]

AIM

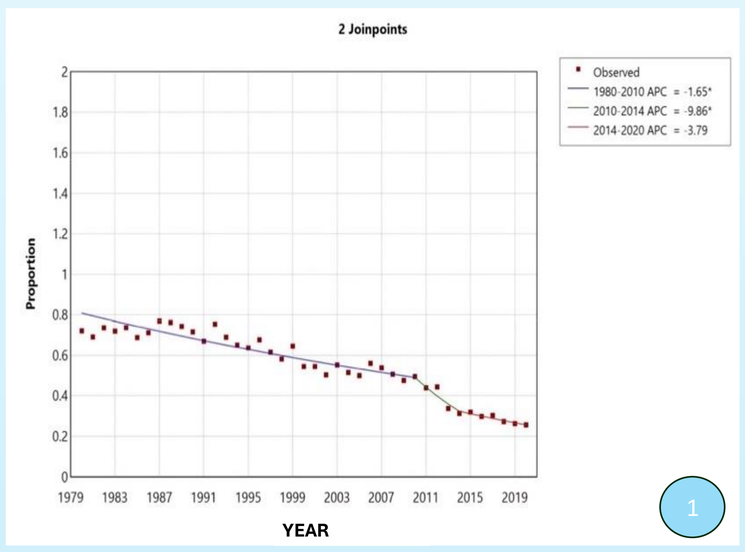
- To analyse trends in place of death among people with dementia in Portugal, as well as their distribution across healthcare services and access to palliative care.

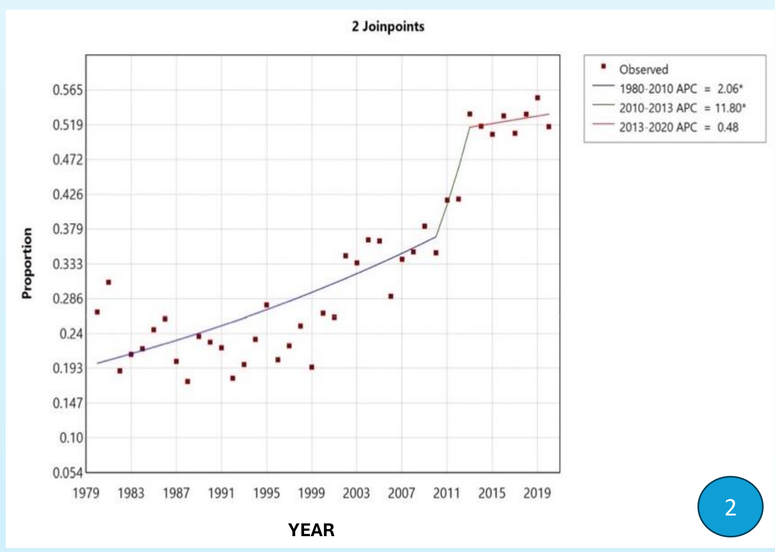
METHODS

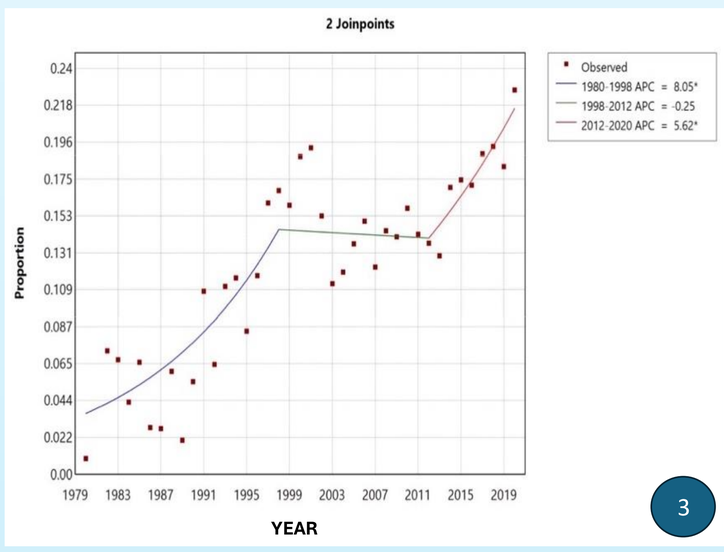
- Cross-sectional, analytical, and observational epidemiological study design;
- Data on place of death (1980–2020) obtained from the National Institute of Statistics;
- Trend and linear regression analysis performed using Joinpoint software;
- Microsoft Forms to healthcare teams in nursing homes, long-term and palliative care networks;
- Service distribution analysed using percentage-based tables (2018-2022);
- Palliative care needs estimated using the Lancet Commission multiplier (80%).[4]

RESULTS

Between 1980 and 2020, 68 542 individuals died from dementia in Portugal: 25 492 (37.2%) at **home (1)**, 31 624 (46.1%) in **hospitals or clinics (2)**, and 11 426 (16.7%) in **other settings (3)**. The data reveal a declining trend in home deaths and a rising trend in institutional deaths, particularly in nursing homes.







Between 2018 and 2022, residential care teams admitted a greater proportion of patients with dementia compared to long-term and palliative care units. Additionally, the number of deaths in nursing homes was higher, underscoring a growing burden and significant unmet need for palliative care in these settings.

	LONG-TERM/ PALLIATIVE CARE UNITS			NURSING HOMES		
YEAR	ADMITTED WITH DEMENTIA (%)	DEATHS BY DEMENTIA (N.º)	DECEASED WITH PALLIATIVE CARE NEEDS (N.º)	ADMITTED WITH DEMENTIA (%)	DEATHS BY DEMENTIA (N.º)	DECEASED WITH PALLIATIVE CARE NEEDS (N.º)
2018	8.7	39	31	33.0	104	83
2019	9.0	61	49	38.2	81	65
2020	7.2	50	40	31.2	73	58
2021	7.2	86	69	43.6	82	66
2022	18.4	97	78	45.2	224	179
		333	**267**		564	**451**

DISCUSSION/ CONCLUSION

Findings indicate a mismatch between preferred and actual places of death, highlighting the need to enhance access to palliative care for people with dementia, especially in long-term care facilities and nursing homes.[5] Further research is recommended to explore end-of-life preferences and to assess healthcare teams' preparedness to deliver appropriate care in these contexts.

REFERENCES

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