

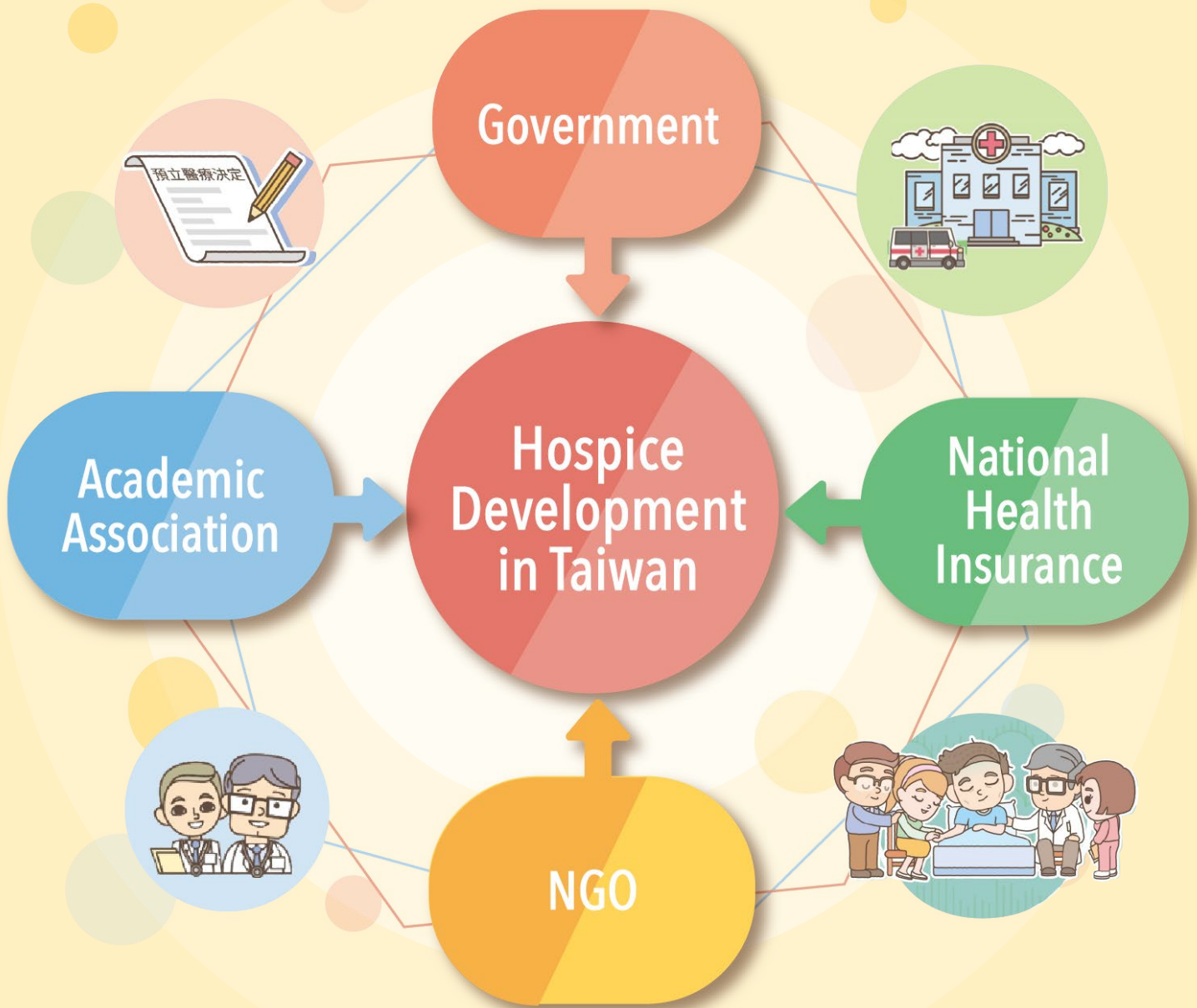


Hospice Foundation of Taiwan

HFT Newsletter

Forever Love, Endless Care

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Growing Wiser through Reflection, Let Us Help Taiwan's Hospice Care to Move Forward

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Hand-in-hand Support for the Future

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Growing Wiser through Reflection, Let Us Help Taiwan's Hospice Care to Move Forward

Taiwan's performance has always been among the best in the global *Assessment of Quality of Death and Dying*. However, besides the outstanding results, the feedback and advice from these assessments are what we really should be paying attention to. We should learn from the shortcomings and continue to improve to provide those in need with our comprehensive services.

After a two-year survey, in 2021, the *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* ranked 81 countries worldwide in terms of the Quality of Death and Dying. Taiwan ranked third in the world and the first in Asia. This assessment result is after two similar surveys were conducted in 2010 and 2015.

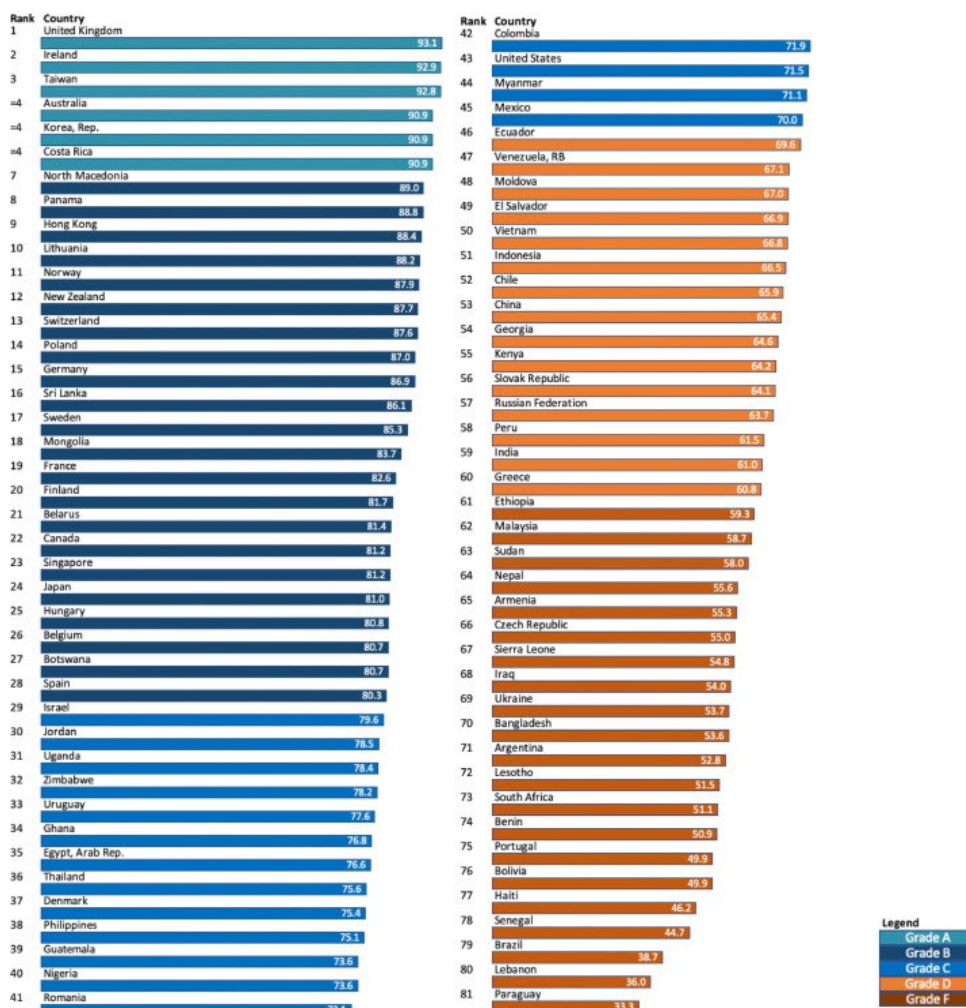


image resource: Finkelstein et al. (2021). Cross Country Comparison of Expert Assessments of the Quality of Death and Dying 2021.

In these three global ranking surveys, Taiwan consistently received favorable results. To go deep into the reasons, we can see that in terms of care, policy, economic and social environment aspects, as well as high coverage of National Health Insurance and the support from the government, are all making positive impacts. Quite frankly, Taiwan's excellent performance is worth publicizing.

Reflection and Review to Make Up for Deficiencies

Although Taiwan's performances were outstanding, we did not forget to go back and review each underperforming area. We wanted to face the problems and identify the lessons so that we can progress even further.

In 2010, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) announced that it was commissioned by the Lien Foundation in Singapore to evaluate the *Quality of Death Index* in 80 countries and regions worldwide. What we saw in that report was not merely Taiwan's 14th place in the overall ranking, but it pointed out that Taiwan's "Availability of End-of-life Care" is still lacking, and this aspect ranked 19th and far below the overall ranking (14th). Thus, Taiwan started to promote Type B Hospice Care¹ to increase the accessibility of the services. Over time, more and more associations were established to provide hospice care so that this weak part of Taiwan's hospice is gradually filling up.

In 2015, Taiwan's global ranking made substantial progress compared with 2010. This time, Taiwan ranked in 6th place. We were still checking the comments and found that among the 50 EIU evaluation items, Taiwan ranked a lowly 24th in the "Quality of Care for Individual Patients," "Human Resources," and "Education." Furthermore, Taiwan ranked 26th in the "Shared Decision-making" element. Although the overall 6th place ranking is worthy of applause, these low-ranking items are undoubtedly warning messages to us on the need to continued improvement.

Therefore, Taiwan has increased the importance of "Shared Decision-making," which is now listed as one of the evaluation items in the hospital's patient evaluations. Meanwhile, we have also strengthened the medical staff and

¹ **Type B Hospice Care Institution:** The government allows general health care institutions to apply as type B hospice-provided institutions, as long as the healthcare providers receive specific training, including 13 hrs of lecture and 8 hrs clinical clerkship regarding hospice. The government will reimburse the institutions for the hospice-related expenditure. There are also Type A institutions, where the training requirement will be more comprehensive.

supplemented training. In just a few years, the above efforts have had noticeably positive results.

Focus on the Needs to Improve the Service

In these global ranking surveys, we did not lose sight on the high ranking, but primarily focused on our insufficiencies. According to the results, we aimed to strengthen, adjust, and make up for the weak spots. The Taiwanese government has even formulated several plans and provided funds to fully support the promotion of hospice care. As a result, since 2015, while many institutions have made significant improvements, a number of institutions are still lagging behind. No matter what, the coverage of hospice care in Taiwan still has room to improve, and yet, the hard work over the years has indeed paid off gradually.

In 2021, Taiwan took the 3rd place ranking award, which proved that we do have the ability to provide first-rate hospice care. Yet, with joy, we continue to clearly focus on those parts we can do even better.

The 13 indicators used this year were compiled from hundreds of references and focused on the top priorities for patients who need hospice care. These included pain control, clean and safe spaces, kindness and care with empathy, respect for different religions, and value for life quality over prolonging life, and etc. A total of 81 countries participated in this survey.

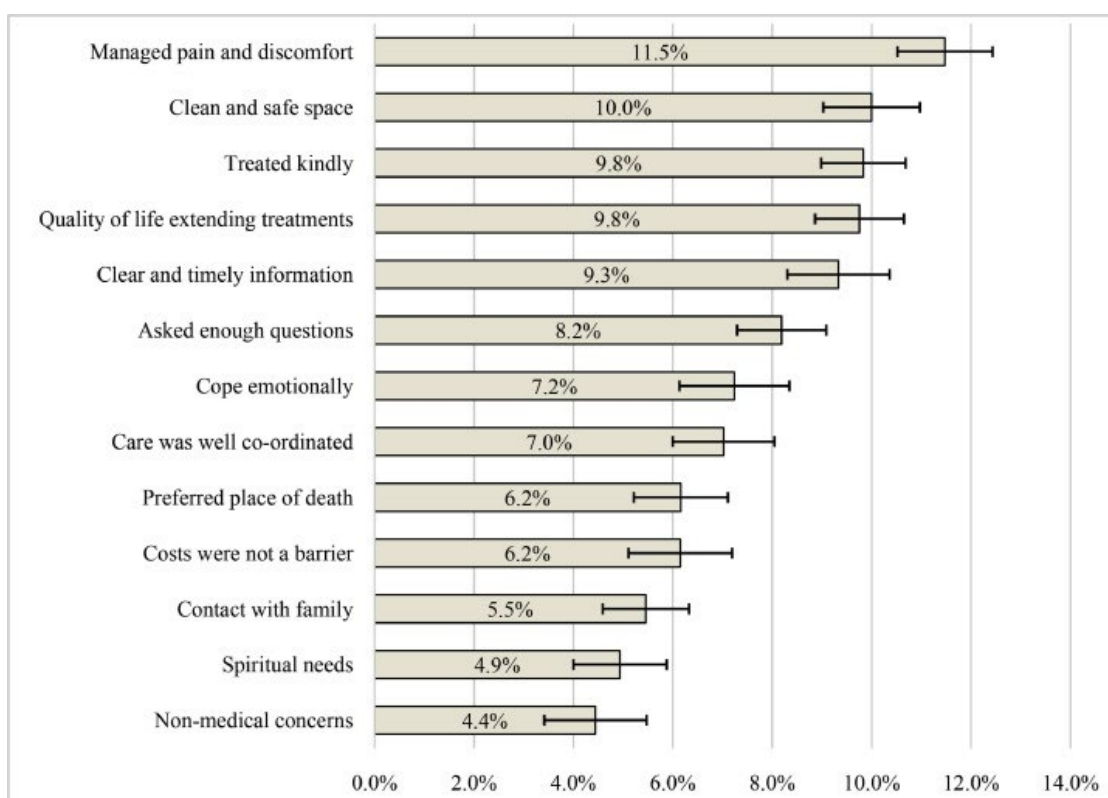


image resource: Finkelstein et al. (2021). Cross Country Comparison of Expert Assessments of the Quality of Death and Dying 2021.

This evaluation survey reminds us that we must understand the needs of the hospice care field by managing the quality care expectations of patients and their families. So, we must consider carefully if there is anything that is not yet comprehensive enough. Perhaps these 13 evaluation items can provide much insight to monitor the content and excellence of Taiwan's Hospice care environment.

Taiwan's hospice care currently provides a full range of services, including hospitalization, home hospice care, and shared hospice care. However, the *quantity* of services provided has always been a challenge to expand. That is, it has been discussed internationally that hospice care can support the late stage of life, but can the services intervene in the earlier stages also?

As for Taiwan's hospice care development, we must start with education. Whether it is policy, medical staff, medical students or the public, the concepts of hospice care should keep pace with the times. In this way, each individual can make full use of their knowledge to help themselves and others to improve their quality of life.

Hand-in-hand Support for the Future

Being in the forefront among the top hospice and palliative care countries, Taiwan receives not only affirmation but also pressure to continue the progress. After all, there is still much to do and a long way to go. While taking the responsibility to carry out hospice care, it is important not to forget to encourage the team members since it is due to their endeavor and perseverance that the Hospice Foundation in Taiwan has continued to grow strong over the years.

For decades, Taiwan has spared no effort in promoting hospice care, particularly in these four aspects. The first is to promote life education to the public. With the efforts made by governmental and non-governmental organizations, professional academic institutions, and religious groups, a significant increase in acceptance of the hospice concept can be seen, when compared to the early days when hospice was just an idea recently introduced to Taiwan. Secondly, the participation of professional academies and institutes in hospice also infuses sufficient energy on-site. Thirdly, the laws and policies are the driving force that has promoted Taiwan's hospice care so that providing hospice care can be protected and have its legal basis, which currently, Taiwan is taking the lead in the world. Finally, our colleagues consistently improve the quality and capability of care.

The above four aspects make us stand out among 81 countries included in the *Quality of Death and Dying Index 2021*. We are proud that Taiwan received a very high overall rating in the Index.

Embrace the Frontline Healthcare Workers Rather than Discourage

In order to train qualified workers, we have held many training courses, with an average of 300 participants completing the training annually. However, the dilemma of insufficient staffing in the medical field still exists. We ask ourselves, *Where are all the trainees that are needed in this field?* It forces us to realize that hospice care is a job that may be well-received by the public, but nevertheless, is unpopular among healthcare workers because of the sheer amount of stress involved.

Unlike the typically accepted medical treatment that aims to save lives and extend people's lifespan, hospice care workers have the invisible yet enormous pressure when caring for the dying patients and assisting them to a good death.

Therefore, instead of forcing the healthcare professionals to move forward, I usually insist that we give applause and encouragement to those who are willing to devote themselves to hospice care. After all, how can we develop and establish hospice care if these frontline workers are already discouraged themselves, and may not even wish to stay in the field? They are undoubtedly a most valuable foundation for hospice care to carry on.

By Using Soft Power, Taiwan's Hospice Care Can Stride Forward

On the other hand, while accepting the affirmation of Taiwan's hospice success, we should neither belittle ourselves nor become complacent. There are still many areas in hospice care which need improvement; we can certainly do even better, and we need to do better.

Some twenty years ago, a quote by Morrie Schwartz made a deep impression on me. He said, "Learn how to live and you'll know how to die; learn how to die, and you'll know how to live." I did not quite understand what the sentence wanted to convey at that time; however, after numerous years of contact working with multiple patients and their families in hospice care, I have gradually come to realize the depth of its meaning. In the past, when a patient was dying, we wanted to help him *die* well, but it would actually be more appropriate to say that we should help him *live* well. After all, how can we die well without first having lived well? And in order to live well, there is nothing else more important than to help a person obtain a peaceful body, mind, society (i.e., relationships), and spirit.

Therefore, we should continue to promote and publicize life care education; we should expect the influences of government, non-government, and religious groups to be combined; and, we should hope to receive more attention from the professional medical associations.

The nature of hospice care is to provide warm support, caring, and companionship, which do not conflict with the typical medical treatment. Undoubtedly, the practice of hospice care is a collective consensus, particularly when holistic care is well advocated nowadays. Even if we can discard the word *hospice*, we cannot lose the

spirit of hospice. All medical associations should give more attention to hospice care and include the topic in their core curriculum. It is gratifying to know that the Taiwan Society of Nephrology and Taiwan Society of Critical Medicine have already added hospice care courses into their curriculum.

In order to improve the quality of *Hospice Care*, the government also convened experts to write the *White Paper on Hospice and Palliative Care in Taiwan* (commissioned by the Taiwan National Health Research Institute) so that we can follow the direction and achieve the set goals step by step.

Taiwan's warm and friendly culture, as well as its soft powers such as the kind-hearted customs, are undoubtedly key advantages for promoting hospice care. We look forward to closely linking the love and warmth, and utilizing the power of social harmony to build upon a better hospice environment in Taiwan.

