

Structured family education for caregivers in palliative care

Submission date 02/05/2026	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	☒ Prospectively registered ☒ Protocol
Registration date 05/05/2026	Overall study status Ongoing	☒ Statistical analysis plan ☐ Results
Last Edited 05/05/2026	Condition category Cancer	☐ Individual participant data ☒ Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Family members and caregivers play an important role in supporting patients receiving palliative care, especially in advanced cancer. However, many caregivers may feel uncertain about what palliative care means, how to recognize and manage common symptoms, and how to cope emotionally. This study aims to find out whether a structured three-session family education program can improve caregiver knowledge, confidence, satisfaction, and caregiver burden compared with standard verbal counselling.

Who can participate?

Adult family members or caregivers aged 18 years and above of patients receiving palliative care at Tawam Hospital can participate. The patient should have an estimated life expectancy of less than 6 months, and the family member or caregiver must be willing to provide informed consent. Family members or caregivers who are unable to attend the structured education sessions cannot participate.

What does the study involve?

Participants will be randomly assigned to one of two groups. One group will receive the structured SHIFA-PC family education program, which includes three sessions of approximately 30 minutes each. The sessions cover an introduction to palliative care, symptom management, and emotional and spiritual support. The other group will receive standard verbal counselling during routine care. Participants will complete questionnaires at baseline, after the education sessions or equivalent follow-up point, and at 1 month.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

Participants may benefit from improved understanding of palliative care, symptom management, and caregiver support. The study may also help improve future family education in palliative care. There may be no direct personal benefit. Possible risks are minimal but may include emotional discomfort when discussing palliative care, caregiving stress, or end-of-life issues. Participants may pause or stop at any time, and concerns can be discussed with the healthcare team.

Where is the study run from?
Tawam Hospital (United Arab Emirates)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
June 2026 to October 2026

Who is funding the study?
Tawam Hospital (United Arab Emirates)

Who is the main contact?
Dr Nandan Maruti Shanbhag, nshanbhag@seha.ae, onco@drnandan.com

Contact information

Type(s)
Principal investigator, Public, Scientific

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Additional identifiers

Study information

Scientific Title
Structured help for families in illness and focused assistance in palliative care: a randomized controlled trial (SHIFA-PC-RCT)

Acronym
SHIFA-PC-RCT

Study objectives
The objective of this study is to evaluate whether a structured three-session family education intervention improves palliative care knowledge among family caregivers of patients receiving palliative care compared with standard verbal counselling.

Secondary objectives are to assess whether the intervention improves caregiver confidence in symptom management, caregiver satisfaction, and caregiver burden measured using the Zarit Burden Interview.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)

1. Approved 27/08/2025, Abu Dhabi Health Research and Technology Ethics Committee (ADHRTC) (Department of Health – Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, 5674, United Arab Emirates; +971 (0)2 4493333; medical.research@doh.gov.ae), ref: DOH/ADHRTC/2025/1999

2. Approved 27/08/2025, Al Ain Region Human Research Ethics Committee (REC) (SEHA Tawam Hospital, Khalifa Bin Zayed Street, Al Ain, 15258, United Arab Emirates; +971 (0)37074757; clinicalresearch@seha.ae), ref: MF2058-2025-1305

Primary study design

Interventional

Allocation

Randomized controlled trial

Masking

Open (masking not used)

Control

Active

Assignment

Parallel

Purpose

Supportive care

Study type(s)**Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied**

Caregiver support, family education, and caregiver burden among family caregivers of patients with advanced cancer receiving palliative care

Interventions

Family members or caregivers will be randomized to either structured SHIFA-PC education sessions or standard verbal counselling during routine care. Participants randomized to the intervention arm will receive three structured family education sessions delivered by trained healthcare professionals. The education sessions cover an introduction to palliative care, symptom management, and emotional/spiritual support.

Participants will be randomized using a computer-generated allocation sequence created before recruitment using a Python script. Participants will be randomized in a 1:1 ratio to either the structured SHIFA-PC family education intervention or standard verbal counselling.

Block randomization with variable block sizes of 4 and 6 will be used. The final allocation sequence will be stored securely. The case manager will act as the randomization custodian and will reveal the allocation only after eligibility is confirmed, informed consent is completed, Study ID is assigned, and baseline assessment is completed. The enrolling team will not know the next allocation before participant enrollment and baseline assessment.

Intervention Type

Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

1. Palliative care knowledge measured using the approved SHIFA-PC symptom checklist at baseline and immediate follow-up after the third education session or equivalent control follow-up point

Key secondary outcome(s)

1. Palliative care knowledge measured using the approved SHIFA-PC symptom checklist at baseline and 1-month follow-up after the third education session or equivalent control follow-up point

2. Caregiver confidence in symptom management measured using approved SHIFA-PC questionnaire confidence items at baseline, immediate follow-up after the third education session or equivalent control follow-up point, and 1-month follow-up

3. Caregiver burden measured using the 22-item Zarit Burden Interview at baseline and 1-month follow-up

4. Caregiver satisfaction measured using approved SHIFA-PC satisfaction survey items at immediate follow-up after the third education session or equivalent control follow-up point, and 1-month follow-up where applicable

5. Session feedback and acceptability measured using approved SHIFA-PC session feedback items and open-ended responses at completion of the structured education sessions

Completion date

30/10/2026

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

1. Adult family members/caregivers aged 18 years and above of patients receiving palliative care
2. Patient life expectancy less than 6 months
3. Family member/caregiver willing to provide informed consent

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Mixed

Lower age limit

18 Years

Upper age limit

100 Years

Sex

All

Total final enrolment
20

Key exclusion criteria
1. Families/caregivers unable to attend structured education sessions

Date of first enrolment
01/06/2026

Date of final enrolment
31/08/2026

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Arab Emirates

Sponsor information

Organisation
SEHA Tawam Hospital

Funder(s)

Funder type

Funder Name
SEHA Tawam Hospital

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

IPD sharing plan summary
Not expected to be made available

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Protocol file	version 1.0		05/05/2026	No	No

