

The Importance of Pain Relief in Cancer Care

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Background 1

- Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide, accounting for 7.6 million deaths (around 13% of all deaths) in 2008 (1).
- Lung, stomach, liver, colon and breast cancer cause the most cancer deaths each year.
- The most frequent types of cancer differ between men and women.
- About 30% of cancer deaths are due to the five leading behavioral and dietary risks: high body mass index, low fruit and vegetable intake, lack of physical activity, tobacco use, alcohol use.
- Tobacco use is the most important risk factor for cancer causing 22% of global cancer deaths and 71% of global lung cancer deaths.
- Cancer causing viral infections such as HBV/HCV and HPV are responsible for up to 20% of cancer deaths in low- and middle-income countries.
- About 70% of all cancer deaths in 2008 occurred in low- and middle-income countries.
- Deaths from cancer worldwide are projected to continue rising, with an estimated 13.1 million deaths in 2030 (2).

Background 2

- Effective public health strategies, comprising of community- and home-based care are essential to provide pain relief and palliative care for patients and their families in low-resource settings.
- Improved access to oral morphine is mandatory for the treatment of moderate to severe cancer pain, suffered by over 80% of cancer patients in terminal phase.

Background 2

- In developed countries, the probability of being diagnosed with cancer is more than twice as high as in developing countries.
- However, in developed countries, only 50% of cancer patients die of the disease.
- In developing countries, 80% of cancer patients present with late-stage incurable tumours.

Pain in Cancer Patients 1

- 1 out of 3 people undergoing cancer treatment have severe pain.
- Patients with advanced have experience more pain.
- Majority of cancer patients in developing world present with advance stage of disease.
- Pain management in cancer should be holistic including palliative care.

Pain in Cancer Patients 2

- Pain relief and anti cancer treatment should go hand in hand
- 66% of patients with advanced disease are in pain.
- The management of pain and symptom become the focus of care.
- The aim of pain treatment should be to allow a cancer patient function effectively and eventually die without pain.
- Pain treatment must therefore be tailored towards individual patient need.

Lessons from Uganda

- Palliative care mainstreamed into National Health Policy and Strategic Plan.
- Nurses and clinical officers with special training in palliative care can prescribe oral morphine.
- Free oral morphine for all patients.

Challenges of cancer pain relief

- Lack of policies on cancer pain relief and palliative care
- Lack of awareness by health workers, policy makers and the general public about pain control in cancer.
- Limited health resources.
- Fear of addiction, dependencies, and drug abuse
- Legal restrictions in most countries.

The End