UN High Level Political Forum – Increasing access to palliative care towards target 3.8

In September 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals were agreed with a goal focussed on 'Health for All'. Governments worldwide signed up to these goals which included a target to achieve Universal Health Coverage by 2030. In July 2017, governments across the world will meet at the High Level Political Forum in New York to update on progress on a number of targets, including health.

We respectfully request that these reports include national level progress in relation to increasing access to palliative care as a core component of the spectrum of essential health services required to achieve Universal Health Coverage (Target 3.8).

Achieving Universal Health Coverage by 2030

Universal Health Coverage is defined as ensuring that all people (children as well as adults) can use the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, which are of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship.

Palliative care and Universal Health Coverage

Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-threatening illness, such as cancer, HIV and dementia, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual. In many settings, palliative care also addresses social, economic, legal and human rights issues relating to life-threatening illness.

People who need palliative care (both children and adults) have some of the highest health needs and households can be forced into poverty by paying for unnecessary, expensive and futile treatments. The availability of palliative care has been shown to reduce household poverty by reducing unnecessary expenditure on health, enabling people affected (including carers) to work as well as improving quality of life.

Ensuring access to palliative care as a part of Universal Health Coverage

To ensure the inclusion of palliative care as a part of Universal Health Coverage, countries need to ensure that:

1. Palliative care, including essential medicines for children and adults, are included in Universal Health Coverage packages
2. Palliative care is included in the National Health Plan and associated budget
3. Palliative care is included in all medical, nursing and social care curricula
4. Palliative care coverage is included in national Universal Health Coverage monitoring.

Suggested intervention at the HLPF

"Improving access to palliative care is a fundamental component of achieving Target 3.8 to achieve Universal Health Coverage by 2030. We are committed to ensuring that people living with, and affected by, life-limiting illness get the access to palliative care they need to alleviate avoidable pain and suffering and improve quality of life."

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