Palliative care
A crucial component of primary health care

What is palliative care?

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines palliative care as "an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification, correct assessment and treatment of pain and other problems whether physical, psychosocial and spiritual."[1]

What is primary health care?

Primary health care (PHC) is essential health care based on practical, scientifically sound and socially acceptable methods and technology made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community through their full participation and at a cost that the community and country can afford to maintain at every stage of their development in the spirit of self-reliance and self-determination.

PHC is made up of three main areas: empowered people and communities; multisectoral policy and action; and primary care and essential public health functions as the core of integrated health services. This includes a spectrum of services from prevention (i.e. vaccinations and family planning) to management of chronic health conditions and palliative care.[2]



PHC supports the right to health.[3]

- It includes evidence based primary care and socially acceptable methods and technology. Primary care should be:
- *universally* accessible to individuals and families in the community;
- *affordable* for the community and country at every stage of development;
- the central *function* and main focus of a country's health system;
- a person's *first level of contact* with the national health system, bringing health care as close as possible to where people live and work.
- aligned with the overall social and economic *development goals* of the community;

PHC and palliative care share core principles including:

- Equitable distribution of health care
- Community participation
- Health workforce development
- Use of appropriate technology
- Care provision across the life-span, from neonates to older persons
- Multisectoral approach.[4]

Why should palliative care be an essential part of PHC?

It relieves serious health related suffering experienced by more than 61.1 million people worldwide each year.[5]

Palliative care is currently available to fewer than 10% of those who need it.[6]

The WHO has stated that "primary health care providers with basic training in palliative care and symptom relief can respond effectively to most palliative care needs and arrange for transfer to a higher level of care when necessary.[7]

icpcn
international children's palliative care network

whpca
worldwide hospice palliative care alliance

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE

PHC, palliative care and the road to Universal Health Coverage (UHC)

The WHO includes palliative care as an essential service under UHC. Achieving UHC by 2030 requires governments to develop publicly funded primary health care policies and systems that integrate palliative care. The Lancet Commission on Pain and Palliative Care estimates the cost of implementing an essential package of palliative care in low and middle- income countries at $3 per capita.[8]

Key Messages

Governments, health systems, and relevant educational institutions should:

- Integrate basic palliative care within primary care delivery services;
- Include essential palliative care skills in the education and training of all health professionals, community health workers and carers;
- Ensure availability of, and access to, essential palliative care medications in the primary health care system;
- Listen to the voices of those affected by serious health related suffering when developing and implementing primary health care policies and services.

Achieving UHC (Target 3.8 SDGs) by 2030 requires publicly funded primary health care that integrates palliative care.

Primary health care systems that have integrated palliative care



- **Become fully person-centred. They are responsive to the total needs of patients, alleviating serious health-related suffering at all stages of the life-course.**
- **Deliver services at healthcare facilities, in the home, or in the community.**
- **Reduce unnecessary hospitalisations and out of pocket catastrophic expenses for households and health systems.**
- **Are less likely to abandon patients with serious illness. Health systems often leave patients who are already vulnerable due to societal fear of illness, death and dying, and disease associated disabilities behind.**

1 WHO Factsheet on Palliative Care 2018 http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/palliative-care (accessed September 2018)

2 http://www.who.int/primary-health/en/ (accessed September 2018)

3 http://www.who.int/publications/almaata_declaration_en.pdf (from the website of WHO accessed September 2018)

4 Adapted from: Integrating palliative care and symptom relief into primary health care: a WHO guide for planners, implementers and managers. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

5 Knaul FM, Farmer PE, Krakauer EL, De Lima L, Bhadelia A, Kwete X et al. Alleviating the access abyss in palliative care and pain relief: an imperative of universal health coverage. Lancet. Published online 12 October 2017;

6 Connor S, Sepulveda Bermedo MC, editors. Global atlas of palliative care at the end of life. London: Worldwide Palliative Care Alliance; 2014 (http://www.who.int/nmh/Global_Atlas_of_Palliative_Care. pdf, accessed September 2018).

7 Integrating palliative care and symptom relief into primary health care: a WHO guide for planners, implementers and managers. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

8 Knaul F et al (2017).