

Hope Worldwide/APCA Partners Work to Improve Palliative Care Services in Côte d'Ivoire

With more than 7 percent of its adult population infected with HIV, Côte d'Ivoire has the highest HIV prevalence rate in West Africa, yet palliative care is not a well known concept and appropriate medications that can ease patient suffering are not widely available.

According to Dr. Solange Balou, executive director of Hope Worldwide in Abidjan (HWCI), palliative care is much more developed in Africa's English-speaking countries than in Francophone nations. "By learning from them, we have the opportunity to rapidly develop the knowledge and skills we need to scale up palliative care services in Côte d'Ivoire," she stresses.



HWCI partners discuss death and mourning at a weekly support group for children.

With support from PEPFAR through CDC/Côte d'Ivoire, HWCI has been working with the Uganda-based African Palliative Care Association since 2007 to improve patient access to a broad spectrum of palliative care services.

Partners conducted a sensitization workshop March 5-6 in Abidjan to share information about palliative care with HWCI staff and volunteers, and interested parties from the Ministry of Health, local teaching hospitals, and other community-

based groups. For many of the practitioners and caregivers who attended the event, the sessions were a revelation.

"This workshop helped me understand that palliative care is not limited to helping PLWH; it encompasses every aspect of pain management," says HWCI counselor Chantal Shouli. Partners provide ongoing training to caregivers like Shouli and have revised HWCI's Guide on Care and Support to include modules on pain management and death and mourning.

"Talking about death and dying during counseling has traditionally been taboo," admits Jean Claude Ouélé, president of an adult PLWH support group, "But what I've learned has convinced me of the importance of equipping our members with the skills they need to better manage death and mourning."

For clinicians, limited availability of opioids and other pain management medications is a real barrier to the delivery of palliative care, says Dr. Beaugre Kouassi, a neurologist and professor from Côte d'Ivoire. HWCI's Dr. Charles Yapi Akoun agrees, noting, "It is my greatest desire to see morphine syrup available in Côte d'Ivoire because at present we are virtually helpless when it comes to managing chronic pain effectively," he says.



Staff at HWCI's Center for Medical and Social Assistance following a training workshop conducted March 25-29 by the Ministry of Health's Palliative Care Technical Working Group.

Partners are working to see that wish fulfilled, advocating for increased availability of drugs and expanded training for healthcare workers and allied caregivers in their ongoing efforts to improve care and support for people living with HIV and other life-threatening illnesses.