

## Partnership Helps Update Palliative Care Standards in Côte d'Ivoire

According to WHO, thousands of individuals in sub-Saharan Africa have incurable diseases — mainly HIV/AIDS and advanced cancer — which cause great suffering to patients and their families.

It is estimated that at least half of all HIV patients and 80 percent of cancer patients will suffer from severe pain in the course of the terminal phase of their disease.

The scale of palliative care needs for HIV and AIDS in Africa outweighs the cancer care needs many times. In Uganda, for example, 20,000 cancer patients need palliative care, while 200,000 AIDS patients need these services.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the government recognizes that palliative care is an essential component of the provision of care for people suffering from HIV/AIDS and other chronic illnesses.

The Ministry of Health has already developed a National Palliative Care Strategy, although it has yet to be integrated into an overall national health strategy.

Even though this — and a number of other related documents, manuals, and guidelines — do exist, most were developed during unstable political times and lack the solid grounding in evidence-based palliative care practices that comes with collaboration with international experts.

With support from PEPFAR through CDC/Côte D'Ivoire, Twinning Center partners at Hope Worldwide in Abidjan and the African Palliative Care Association in Kampala, Uganda, conducted in 2009 a review of key documents, including the country's national palliative care guidelines, training manuals for healthcare professionals and community workers, data collection tools, and essential medications list.

Based on the review, partners submitted recommendations to the Technical Working Group for Palliative Care in Côte D'Ivoire and organized a workshop July 28-August 1 to discuss how to move forward with revision of the training manuals and other critical guidelines, according to APCA Mentorships Manager Abby Baguma.

"Much was achieved during the workshop, in particular a commitment was made to develop a National Palliative Care Association in Côte D'Ivoire," Baguma says, noting that Hope Worldwide was given a mandate to lead these efforts in conjunction with the National Palliative Care Technical Work Group.

"By the end of the workshop there was definitely a renewed enthusiasm to see palliative care become a reality in Côte d'Ivoire," she says.

Palliative care expert Collette Cunningham — who has significant experience working with the Palliative Care Association of Zambia — consulted on the project, lending technical expertise and insight to the document revision process.

"The new National Policy for Palliative Care in Côte D'Ivoire offers excellent guidance and can stand as a reference document for other francophone countries in Africa. Its contents are rooted in evidence-based research and the latest international best practices in palliative care," she explains.

“The training documents form a complete course on palliative care for healthcare professionals and the Quality Standards for Palliative Care document is highly professional. If these standards are applied in Côte D’Ivoire then programs here will be providing the best possible palliative care in African settings.”

According to Dr. Solange Balou, Executive Director of Hope Worldwide in Côte D’Ivoire, the workshop was an invaluable meeting of the minds that “has allowed us to improve the quality of the training documents and norms and standards, as well as to adapt the practical guidelines of palliative care. It also helped to redefine the coordination of palliative care through the creation of a national association of palliative care, which is expected to occur by the end of 2009 with support of the Ministry of Health.”



Thanks to the support of the American people through PEPFAR, Twinning Center partners from Hope Worldwide, APCA, and other key stakeholders are helping redefine the provision of palliative care in Côte d’Ivoire by revising national guidelines and training materials in keeping with international best practices.

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