

Training Men to Provide Community-based Palliative Care in Zambia

One of the biggest challenges facing healthcare systems in Zambia, and all of Africa, is the severe shortage of trained healthcare workers. This is a problem across all health-related disciplines, including palliative care.

In 2005, the HIV/AIDS Twinning Center launched a partnership linking the Lusaka-based Palliative Care Association of Zambia (PCAZ) with the African Palliative Care Association (APCA) in Kampala, Uganda.

With support from PEPFAR through USAID/Zambia, partners have been collaborating to build PCAZ's institutional and human resource capacity with the goal of making it the preeminent palliative care advocacy organization in Zambia. Another goal has been to elevate palliative care on the national healthcare agenda and ensure patients have access to high quality care and appropriate medications.

The partnership has exposed PCAZ staff to a broad range of palliative care models that have proven effective elsewhere in Africa and around the globe. This has had a positive impact on their efforts to address the country's shortage of trained palliative care providers and helped drive the type of training programs they offer.

In January 2009, PCAZ and APCA conducted a training workshop that was designed to bring more men into the palliative care workforce — a unique concept for what has traditionally been thought of as “women's work,” says Patricia Ulaya, Acting National Coordinator of PCAZ.

“Traditionally, care-giving has always been a task for women. When I graduated and started working in a hospice, though, some men would refuse my help because they were uncomfortable receiving care from a woman,” Ulaya points out, noting that while some men



Male caregivers receive instruction during a practical session on basic nursing skills.

prefer to receive care from a man, there are very few male caregivers who can accommodate this preference.

“By training male caregivers as a group, we are acknowledging the important role they play in the provision of palliative care and encouraging them in this endeavor,” she continues.

Together with their partners at APCA, PCAZ experts developed training materials for the program and have so far trained 67 men as community caregivers in Lusaka.

Mpanshya Hospice in Chongwe District sent their male caregivers to the January training and began conducting their own palliative care trainings for community caregivers in cooperation with PCAZ, APCA, and Catholic Relief Services using PCAZ's Male Caregiver Manuals in March.

Of the 23 participants at that training, 10 were men, which indicated improved male involvement in the provision of community-based care.



Participants who completed the January training pose with their certificates.