

International Insight

Bringing Palliative Care to the Developing World

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Can you imagine what it would be like if you registered your cancer-related pain as 10 on a 10-point scale and were told there was nothing that could be done about it? Or that you could only receive a three-day supply of twice-daily 10 mg injectable morphine from the central cancer hospital, located 300 miles from your home?

Such scenarios are reality for people with advanced cancer in most parts of the world. Only approximately 25 of the world's 198 countries have doctors and nurses who are qualified to administer morphine, as well as regulations that govern the administration of morphine and laws that facilitate the importation and distribution of sufficient amounts of the pain-relieving agent.¹

To address this global deficiency, the Worldwide Palliative Care

Alliance, in conjunction with national and regional hospice and palliative care associations around the globe, organizes an annual World Hospice and Palliative Care Day—a unified day of action to celebrate and support palliative care throughout the world. More than 70 countries participate in the event, which is held on the second Saturday of October and includes activities designed to raise awareness of the need for and importance of hospice and palliative care.

In 2007, more than 300 events were hosted in association with World Hospice and Palliative Care Day, including special lectures, the launch of projects and websites with an emphasis on palliative care, and 432 Voices for Hospices concerts in 58 countries. (See www.worldday.org/events/events_list_all_2007.asp for the comprehensive program of the 2007 event.)

ASCO celebrates and supports the mission of World Hospice and Palliative Care Day in many ways. In a 1998 position paper, the Society proclaimed that oncologists have a responsibility to care for patients with cancer throughout the course of their illness (*J Clin Oncol.* 1998;16:1986-1996). That includes a professional duty to be competent in basic approaches to relieving cancer-related pain and to advocate for the resources necessary to provide effective



Photograph courtesy of Frank D. Ferris, MD.

Administration of first dose of oral immediate-release morphine in Jordan, 2004.

care and counseling to all patients and families.

Since the publication of that article, ASCO has developed several resources to help members meet this professional goal. In 2001, the Society published *Optimizing Cancer Care—The Importance of Symptom Management* as part of its Curriculum series. The book is designed to enhance users' knowledge about how to treat the whole patient and addresses supportive care essentials in 29 areas of symptom management with treatment scenarios, algorithms, and tables.

More recently, ASCO partnered with the Education in Palliative and End-of-life Care (EPEC) Project, the National Cancer Institute, and the Lance Armstrong Foundation to develop and disseminate the EPEC™-Oncology Curriculum. Available for download at no cost from the NCI website (www.cancer.gov/aboutnci/epeco), this comprehensive resource provides both the information oncologists need to be better physicians and the tools to provide instruction in symptom management to other professionals who care for patients with cancer.

Handouts, slides, and video clips included with the EPEC™-O Curriculum are designed to initiate debate and discussion among users, and model clinical skills are also included. Doctors and nurses can receive continuing medical education (CME) or continuing education credits by completing the test questions included on the CD-ROM. When one module, "The Last Hours of Living," was made available as a web-based self-study module (at www.medscape.com/viewprogram/5808), it became the most accessed CME activity in the Medscape catalogue within three months. ASCO is working with like-minded organizations internationally to bring these tools to anyone who needs them. The EPEC™-O Curriculum has been translated into Spanish, and additional translations are planned.

On October 11, 2008, ASCO members are invited to join in the celebration of World Hospice and Palliative Care Day and to increase community and media awareness of palliative care either by creating a special event of their own or by joining an event already planned for their community. The theme for the 2008 event is "Hospice and Palliative Care: A Human Right," and additional information is available at www.worldday.org.

Reference

1. Pain & Policy Studies Group, Madison, Wisconsin. 4 December 2007 <http://www.painpolicy.wisc.edu/>. 22 February 2008.

Education in Palliative and End-of-life Care in Oncology (EPEC™-O) Curriculum

EPEC™-O is a comprehensive curriculum in palliative and end-of-life care developed specifically for clinicians who treat patients with cancer. The resource, which is divided into three plenary sessions and includes 15 content modules, seeks to equip users with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide palliative interventions to patients and to address the physical, psychosocial, and spiritual issues associated with cancer.



Upcoming EPEC™-O courses

ASCO is working with prospective host organizations to present EPEC™-O as an Advanced Cancer Course. The South East Mediterranean Cancer Organization (SEMCO) has applied to present EPEC™-O as an Advanced Cancer Course in 2009.

If your organization is interested in presenting EPEC™-O as an Advanced Cancer Course, or in translating the EPEC™-O content into your language, send an e-mail to acc@asco.org.

For more information about EPEC™-O and to obtain a CD-ROM in English, visit www.asco.org/epecocd.