

Palliative Care: A case for the growing need of community based palliative care in India

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In India, more than one million people are diagnosed with cancer every year. The country is also stated to have an equal number of patients with other incurable diseases such as AIDS, and other neurological cardiac and respiratory diseases.¹ Moreover, as per a report released by United Nations Population Fund, the elderly population in India is expected to reach 173 million by 2026. In view of this, palliative care has become synonymous with providing quality health care services. However, being a relatively new concept in India, there is a severe lacuna in terms of awareness, training and service provision of palliative care. With around 98% of the target populations having no access to services, there is a need to shift towards a community based model of palliative care. The Kerala model on palliative care has been a leading example of health movement by effective community participation, involvement of local self government institutions and incorporation of palliative care within the existing health system². The paper will draw from successful interventions of the Kerala model will propose a community based model for palliative care. This involves incorporating the physical, psychosocial and spiritual dimensions with regard to awareness creation, service provision, capacity building of stakeholders, community participation and collaboration of various stakeholders. Catholic Health Association of India (CHAI) has been working in the area of health since 1994 with the aim of providing health for all. This paper will also highlight the interventions of CHAI in the area of community based palliative care. Currently CHAI is aiming at creating awareness and building capacities of its large network of health workers at the communities in palliative care. One of the future thrust of CHAI is providing community based palliative care services through these trained health workers.

¹ WHO-Government of India collaborative programme (2010-11)

² Boughey Allison (2011), An observational comparison of palliative care policy and its implementation in Kerala, India and Victoria, Australia