

Integrating palliative care and symptom relief into primary health care

A WHO guide for planners, implementers and managers



World Health
Organization

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Foreword

The World Health Assembly has resolved that palliative care is “an ethical responsibility of health systems” and that integration of palliative care into public health care systems is essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal on universal health coverage (WHA 67.19). Yet palliative care and symptom relief are rarely accessible in a number of countries. As a result, suffering on a massive scale remains unrelieved, and progress toward universal health coverage is at risk. The World Health Assembly also has called for Member States to “put people at the centre of health care” by providing “comprehensive primary care services, including health promotion, disease prevention, curative care and palliative care, that are integrated with other levels of care” (WHA 62.12).

The great majority of people who need palliative care prefer to remain at home, thus, it is medically and ethically necessary that palliative care be provided in the community, as part of primary health care. It is neither possible nor necessary that palliative care specialists provide most palliative care and symptom relief. Primary health care providers with basic training in palliative care and symptom relief can respond effectively to most palliative care needs and arrange for transfer to a higher level of care when necessary. Emphasis should be given to continuity of care, respect for patients’ values, equitable access to services, and attention not only to patients but also to their families.

This manual is part of a series of WHO publications on palliative care. Their objective is not to provide clinical guidelines, but rather practical guidance on integrating palliative care and symptom relief into health care systems. It is intended, to assist anyone involved with planning, implementing, managing or assuring the quality of PHC to integrate palliative care and symptom control. With this guide, WHO reiterates its commitment to answering the needs and expectations of all people, especially the most vulnerable.



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Abbreviations and acronyms

AIDS	acquired immune deficiency syndrome
APCA	African Palliative Care Association
CHC	community health centre
CHW	community health worker
EAPC	European Association of Palliative Care
EP PHC	Essential Package of Palliative Care for Primary Health Care
HIC	high-income country
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
IAHPC	International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care
INCB	International Narcotics Control Board
LMICs	low- and middle-income countries
NCD	noncommunicable disease
NGO	nongovernmental organization
PHC	primary health care
SSRI	selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor
UHC	universal health coverage
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHA	World Health Assembly
WHO	World Health Organization

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