

# Perceived Palliative Care Needs of Cancer Patients, Nurses and Domiciliary Care Providers at a National Cancer Referral Facility, Sri-Lanka

Lalitha Meegoda<sup>1</sup>, Sharaine Fernando<sup>2</sup>, Sivagurunathan Sivayogan<sup>3</sup>, Nnodimele Onuigbo Atulomah<sup>4</sup>, Jayantha Jayasiri<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Allied Health Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Gangodawila, Sri Lanka

<sup>2</sup>Department of Physiology, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Gangodawila, Sri Lanka

<sup>3</sup>Department of Community Medicine, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Gangodawila, Sri Lanka

<sup>4</sup>Department of Public Health, University of Babcock, Nigeria

<sup>5</sup>Department of Sociology, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Gangodawila, Sri Lanka

## ABSTRACT

**BACKGROUND:** Cancer is an important cause of morbidity and mortality among all populations and patients need special care while care providers need special skills and resources; all this constitutes a challenge especially in resource limited settings. The study describes the perceptions of cancer patients, nurses and domiciliary care providers (DCPs) with respect to palliative care needs of adult cancer patients and to identify the levels of patients satisfaction with regards to care received at the National Institute of Cancer, Maharagam (NICM), Sri-Lanka.

**METHODS:** The study was a descriptive cross-sectional survey using both interviewer-administered and self-administered validated questionnaires to collect data from 124 patients, 100 nurses and 100 DCPs at the NICM. The level of satisfaction was identified using a rating scale and percentages were computed.

**RESULTS:** We found that 68% of patients reported that their most common need was pain relief followed by interpersonal

relationship (60%) and majority (86%) confirmed that these were adequately met. 70% of the patients expressed full satisfaction with the psychological support they received. Only 54% of nurses surveyed expressed satisfaction with the care they provided. Most nurses (96%) had not attended any educational program on palliative care, and 94% of DCPs expressed the need to improve their knowledge and skills on palliative care. All DCPs thought that patients have care needs other than the treatment, mainly pain relief. DCPs thought that all patients were satisfied with the care they provided.

**CONCLUSION:** Palliative care needs of adult cancer patients were well identified by the nurses and the level of patients' satisfaction was high. However 96% of the nurses had not attended any educational program on palliative care and felt in-service training program can help to improve their knowledge. Although DCPs were satisfied with the services they provided, they too thought that their knowledge was not adequate.

Keywords: Palliative care; Cancer; Nurses; Domiciliary care providers

## INTRODUCTION

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death in the world particularly in developing countries [1]. According to the world cancer report, prevalence of cancer is increasing at an alarming rate globally. In 2005, 7.6 million people died of cancer out of 58 million deaths worldwide. More than 70% of all cancer deaths occur in low and middle income countries, where resources

available for prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer are limited or non-existent [1]. In Sri Lanka, almost 25,000 new and treated cases of cancer were recorded in 2002, representing more than a 100 per cent increase over the figures for 1992. Presently, cancer ranks fifth in the order of hospital deaths in Sri Lanka [2].

Palliative care is an important aspect of managing cancer patients. It is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their

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Correspondence to: Dr Lalitha Meegoda

Address: Department of Allied Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Gangodawila, Sri Lanka

Email: [meegodal@yahoo.com](mailto:meegodal@yahoo.com)

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