

Ghana Workshop Helps West African Caregivers Chart a Course for Improving Palliative Care

Healthcare professionals, policymakers, and allied caregivers from six West African nations gathered in Accra, Ghana, May 9-11 to take part in a palliative care advocacy workshop.

Hosted by the African Palliative Care Association (APCA) with Twinning Center support, the workshop was designed to arm participants with the knowledge and skills they need to more effectively influence palliative care policies in their respective countries—particularly access to crucial pain management medications.



“Through APCA and the other organizations present here, we can work together to manage the pain of those living with HIV,” Dr. Kofi Akmed, chief medical officer at the Ministry of Health of Ghana, told attendees. “This conference offers us a great opportunity to advance palliative care.”



Delegations included senior pharmacists, ministry of health representatives, heads of oncology and HIV/AIDS treatment facilities, and palliative care providers from Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone.

During the advocacy workshop, participants discussed the status of palliative care in their respective countries and worked together to develop strategies for improving patient access to care and essential medicines.

Palliative care experts from WHO, OSI’s International Palliative Care Initiative, and the Foundation for Hospice in Sub-Saharan Africa presented during the event and consulted with the country teams during break-out sessions. Other speakers included experts from the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organisation, the Pain and Policy Study Group, Help the Hospices, and APCA.

For many participants, the workshop was an eye-opening experience. Explaining that palliative care is not a familiar concept in much of Africa, Dr. Beaugre Kouassi, a neurologist and professor from Côte d’Ivoire, said, “The country reports illustrated that opioid availability is a real problem that we must solve in order to deliver palliative care. Our work here gives us an idea of what we can do when we return to our own countries.”

With so many people in the region suffering intractable pain, due to cancer or AIDS, improving palliative care services are more critical than ever, according to Dr. Jonah

N. Wefuan, director of the Ministry of Public Health in Cameroon. "It is the right of every individual not to have pain. If we can alleviate their suffering in any way, we have done our jobs," he said.

Charles Munda, a community health officer at Shepherd's Hospice in Sierre Leone, best summed up the feelings of most people in attendance when he said, "Everyone has the right to the highest possible quality of life. I work in palliative care because I want to serve humanity and attend to poor people who are suffering."