



News from the EAPC research network

The Research Steering Committee (RSC) of the EAPC was established in 1996. The group meets regularly and has published a series of papers on topics identified as 'hot spots' in palliative care. The RSC is organising expert working groups on two further topics: fatigue in palliative care patients and prognostic factors in advanced cancer patients.

Fatigue in palliative care patients

Fatigue is frequently reported by cancer patients, as well as by other patients receiving palliative care. Fatigue after chemotherapy or radiotherapy may severely impair the quality of life of palliative care patients, as well as that of long-term survivors. However, fatigue is a multidimensional construct and may not be used with the same meaning by physicians, palliative care staff and patients. The term 'fatigue' is not available in some European languages, such as German, and can be used with different meanings in others.

Research has correlated a number of factors, such as anaemia or cytokine levels, with the intensity of fatigue assessed by the patient. However, it is not yet clear whether subtypes of fatigue with different aetiologies can be distinguished, or to what extent multiple aetiologies may add to the patient's subjective feeling of fatigue.

With increasing focus on fatigue, differing treatment options have been proposed, including drugs, such as methylphenidate or modafinil, physical and psychological therapies. However, little data from clinical trials have been published and there are no standards for treatment available.

The time has now come to gather evidence and expertise and to agree on a pragmatic treatment approach for clinical practice. The RSC has decided to organise an expert working group on fatigue. This group will meet for a workshop in Aachen, Germany, from 28 to 30 November 2003.

Prognostic factors in advanced cancer patients

The use of clearly identified prognostic factors can ensure the most appropriate intervention for the patient and avoid both over- and undertreatment in terms of clinical therapeutic factors and care planning (such as the timing of referral to palliative care programmes). Knowledge of prognostic factors can also assist in family counselling and in helping family members accept the course of the disease.

On the other hand, prognostic information only provides us with probabilities and great caution has to be used in every individual case. Patients must be protected from health managers who may be tempted to use prognostic indicators not to avoid futile therapies, but to deny appropriate therapies ('the cheapest patient is the dead patient').

The RSC will be setting up a working group on prognostic factors in advanced cancer patients, starting with the organisation of a workshop.

The workshop and working group will aim to identify which topics have a sufficient level of evidence and which deserve more quantitative or qualitative research. In particular, the role of prognostic scores needs to be clarified. Ethical implications and the appropriate use of prognostic factors is another area of interest. The workshop may also suggest a minimum standard of methodological features to reduce

discrepancies among studies, which may be difficult to compare due to differences in study populations.

News from EAPC East

New developments

The work to improve palliative care in Eastern European countries is actively continuing. Those involved in palliative care in Romania are resolutely working to get a change in regulations for handling and using opioids, while those in Bulgaria have examined and reported on public opinion to assess the need for hospices and attitudes towards palliative care. A national palliative care organisation has been formed in Albania. Courses and education on palliative care are carried out with both national and international initiatives and support.

The EAPC Conference

At the EAPC conference in The Hague in April, new posters were hung every day of the conference. There were about 600 posters in total; 45 of which were from delegates from Eastern European countries. Each day, the best poster was selected. Elena Vvedenskaya from Russia won one of the days with her poster 'Palliative care for the elderly – first steps in Nizhny Novgorod'. There was a large interest in participating in the conference and there were more than 50 applications for the available grants. Ten EAPC/Open Society Institute grants were approved and as many as 100 individuals secured funding from elsewhere to take part in the conference.

Twinning programme

At our co-ordination centre in Stockholm, we have contacts with palliative care units and hospices in several European countries that would

like to twin with other units. Please contact us if you are interested in participating in this programme.

Photography exhibition

There are ten countries participating in a photo documentary on palliative care. The result is an exhibition that opened at the Voices for Hospices event in Stockholm, Sweden on 4 October. If possible, we would like the exhibition to go on tour around Europe and include even more countries. If you are interested in taking part in the second phase of the exhibition, please get in touch. For more information, please contact: Sylvia.Sauter@stockholmssjukhem.se

The African Palliative Care Association

The African Palliative Care Association (APCA), founded in 2003, supports and promotes the development of palliative care and palliative care professionals throughout Africa. It consists of professionals and others with an interest in the promotion of palliative care, and local and national palliative care associations and programmes.

The aims and objectives of the APCA

- To promote the use of existing knowledge in palliative care and to train those involved with the care of those with life-threatening diseases.
- To promote research into African needs and how best to meet them.
- To foster links between those who study and practise the disciplines connected with the care of patients with life-threatening diseases, their relatives and carers.
- To address ethical problems associated with the treatment of the terminally ill.

- To establish an inter-African and international network for the exchange of information and expertise.
- To promote or sponsor publications or periodicals on palliative care.
- To acknowledge the achievements of already established programmes.
- To promote access to human and financial resources for emerging programmes that meet APCA criteria.
- To promote standards for the quality provision of palliative care services for adults and children.
- To be an advocate to governments for affordable and appropriate palliative care to be incorporated into the spectrum of healthcare services.
- To promote the availability of affordable palliative care drugs for all in need.
- To encourage the establishment of national palliative care associations in all African countries.
- To encourage sharing among such associations.
- To promote training programmes suitable for African countries.
- To establish standard guidelines for training at different levels.

The benefits of membership

The benefits of membership include:

- Receiving the quarterly newsletter
 - Receiving up-to-date and advanced notice of events
 - Receiving a free copy of the *APCA Journal of Palliative Care* twice a year
 - Receiving support from both the association and other APCA members
 - Receiving an updated list of members' contact details once a year.
- For further information about the APCA, please contact the APCA at: APCA, PO Box 7757, Kampala, Uganda or email: apca@hospiceafrica.or.ug

School of Nursing, Faculty of Medicine, American University of Beirut

Academic positions open

The American University of Beirut (AUB) was founded in 1866 as the first US university abroad and historically is the premier university in the Middle East. The AUB continues to provide education following the American model. Its School of Nursing was the first nursing school in the Middle East. A number of positions are currently open. We are inviting applications from those with PhDs with expertise in Nursing Research, Nursing Theory, Advanced Nursing Practice/Adult Care/Chronic Illness and Nursing Administration. Applicants should submit a complete CV, a letter, including a statement on their teaching and research interests, and the names, mailing addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses of three references to: Huda Abu-Saad Huijer, Director, School of Nursing, Faculty of Medicine, American University of Beirut, PO Box 11-0236, Riad El-Solh, Beirut 1107 2020, Lebanon. Tel: +961 1 374374 Ext 5952/3 & 5950/1. email: admmsg@aub.edu.lb or huda.huijer@aub.edu.lb

A copy should also be sent to: American University of Beirut, Personnel Services, 3 Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, 8th Floor, New York, NY 10017-2303, USA.

Electronic applications are welcome. Applications will remain open until positions are filled. Those interested in spending a sabbatical at the AUB are also welcome to apply. The AUB is an affirmative action, equal opportunity employer. Its website is www.aub.edu.lb

We would like to thank our official sponsors for 2003:

