

Belgrade Statement

"Palliative care for all...who are in need of it"

Illness, loss and death are an integral and inevitable part of the human experience. Palliative care is a component of the assistance that can be given to those who need it and as such it encompasses the active total care of patients with advanced, progressive diseases, offering psychological, social, and spiritual support. The aim is to maintain the best possible quality of life for each individual patient and their family. Although it is not always possible to add days to the patient's life, it is certainly possible to add quality of life to the patient's days.

Across Europe, countries are starting to recognise and address the need for increasing palliative care provision. In the next 10 to 15 years, there will be an estimated 20% increase in the need for palliative care for the elderly population alone. This poses great challenges for all European countries, and the decades of developments, starting from the early hospice movement pioneered by the late Dame Cicely Saunders in Great Britain, must be reviewed.

Inspired by the Recommendation Rec (2003) 24 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe "on the organisation of palliative care" a European conference was held in Belgrade on 20-21 October 2005. Attended by 300 participants from 30 European countries, the Conference fully endorsed the recommendation and supported its full implementation in member states. It strongly supports its main message, that palliative care should become an integral part of the health care system, that it must be an inalienable element of a citizen's right to health care, being accessible at a time and in a setting consistent with the needs and well-informed choices of the patient.

In order to apply the Recommendation Rec (2003) 24 as a useful tool and a vehicle for introducing changes to improve palliative care, member states are encouraged, in collaboration with health care professionals, NGOs, patient and family to develop a national policy framework for palliative care. This must include guidance on settings and services, policy and organisation, quality improvement and research, education and training, the family, communication with patient and family, care planning and bereavement.

Creating a positive image of palliative care, opening a public debate on difficult issues of life and death, integrating the palliative care into the health care system, building a shared vision to enable the interdisciplinary approach, engaging civil society and mass media – all these are prerequisites for success.

In this respect, the diffusion and dissemination of Recommendation in 20 different languages, thanks largely to the European Association of Palliative Care, is greatly appreciated by conference participants. On a larger scale this means that the text is directly accessible to 600 million Europeans. Further dissemination will be followed by the assistance offered by the Council of Europe to member states in implementing its own recommendation. Serbian participants at the Conference welcome the wish of its government to become a pilot country for this exercise.

At the Council of Europe's Conference of European Health Ministers held from 12-13 June 2003, an "Oslo Declaration on Health, Dignity and Human Rights" was issued in which it was agreed «to develop palliative care to make it more readily available to all who need it and cooperate between countries to address the difference in the availability and quality of palliative care throughout Europe». This declaration confirmed that palliative care should be one of the priorities on the international and national political agenda. Strong cooperation and links should be established to reach the goals of the declaration between the Council of Europe and other relevant organisations and networks, such as World Health Organisation, European Association for Palliative Care and Eastern and Central European Palliative Care Task force.

The Belgrade Conference welcomed the initiative of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to prepare a follow-up report on palliative care in Europe, which will keep the issue on a European agenda.

In conclusion, all at the Belgrade Conference call for every European citizen to experience less suffering, more dignity and enhanced quality of life during their whole journey of disease.

It is time for action.

Palliative care must not be a luxury, available only for rich countries, or rich patients in poor countries.

"Palliative care for all who are in need of it."