

Establishing Trained Palliative Care Teams to initiate Palliative Care Services in Referral Hospitals in Sri Lanka : A Pilot Programme

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Palliative care is the prevention and relief of suffering experienced by adults and children living with life limiting illnesses and their families. In view of the exponential rise in chronic non-communicable diseases in Sri Lanka, palliative care remains a major gap in the current healthcare system. Appropriate palliative care approach could save costs and improve the quality of life of patients who could be managed at their own community. Palliative and End of Life Care Task Force is an expert committee established under the Sri Lanka Medical Association which comprises multidisciplinary healthcare professionals and civil society. As palliative care is an interdisciplinary effort, establishing trained palliative care teams in the referral hospitals is crucial in initiating and establishing palliative care services in the country. A pilot programme was planned in Western province to train hospital palliative care teams in alignment with the National Strategic framework on Palliative care. A situational analysis was done. A workshop was held to develop a curriculum to train healthcare staff on palliative care which was followed by a two-day training workshop to build teams and train them to function in those referral hospitals as palliative care teams. Six hospital teams of 8-10 healthcare professionals from all categories attended the workshop. Training programme consisted of basic concepts of palliative care, guidance to common symptom control, soft skills, hands-on skills and case-based discussions. All topics were delivered by experts in relevant fields. All participants were satisfied about the programme content and arrangements with suggestions on improvements. All trained palliative care teams were functional in the hospitals following the programme. This pilot training programme has been successful in establishing trained palliative care teams in selected hospitals in Western province. Such teams might be imperative to initiate and continue palliative care services in referral level hospitals in Sri Lanka.

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