



Older person's right to palliative care

This OEWSGA 8 is focusing on discussing two specific elements pertaining to the rights of older persons, namely equality and discrimination; and violence, abuse and neglect. Palliative care is a cross-cutting, multi-disciplinary approach that touches on all aspects of the rights relating to these two elements.

Palliative care is the active, comprehensive, and interdisciplinary care and treatment of patients whose illness is not responding to curative treatment or who are suffering avoidable pain, in order to improve their quality of life until the last day of their lives. Central to palliative care is control of pain, of other symptoms, and of the social, psychological, and spiritual problems of the older person. It includes the patient, their environment, and their family. It affirms life and considers death a normal process, neither hastening nor delaying it. The World Health Organisation considers palliative care services to be "essential," and urges member states to take a lifecourse approach. Universally accessible, affordable and available palliative care for older persons at the community level respects, protects and fulfills the **equal** right to healthcare, and often, the rights to life and economic productivity.

Discrimination happens when health systems prioritise restoring the health of economically productive and reproductive persons, over caring for older persons with life-limiting illnesses, "who will die anyway."

Palliative care services for older persons can also help to protect them against private violations of the right to be free from neglect, violence, and abuse in the home or institution. These services can provide practical caregiver support and information, mitigating the stress and burnout that precipitate abuse. Palliative care should be an essential rights-based feature of all long term care facilities, whose staff should be appropriately trained in the basics of the discipline.

As well as being protective, palliative care for older persons is both autonomy restoring and respecting whenever this is possible. By addressing the multiple dimensions of suffering of both patients and caregivers, palliative care improves the quality of life of patients and caregivers, often allowing older persons to participate actively in the family and community until natural death.

The Organization of American States has set a great example to the other regions of the world by adopting the Inter American Convention on the Rights of Older Persons which includes robust language on palliative care. We commend the American States for this initiative and hope that a similar global instrument, protecting the rights of all older persons in all countries of the world will one day result from this working group.



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE
Advancing Hospice & Palliative Care Worldwide

The International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care (IAHPC) thanks the members of the 8th OEWSGA for its efforts and stands ready to help interested countries to develop access to palliative care services and improve the availability of controlled medicines. We work in Geneva with the World Health Organisation, in Vienna with the Committee on Narcotic Drugs, and with member states upon request.

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