

IAHPC Statement on Public Health Implications of the World Drug Problem, WHA71, Committee B

Thank you Chair. I am Dr. Frank Manase, a palliative care physician from Tanzania, Dar Es Salaam.

This item is very personal for me and my patients, who often -- after I have prescribed them medicines containing opioids -- say, “where were you doc when I needed you? **I should NOT have gone through this agony!**”

Thank you to the Government of Tanzania for including opioids in the Essential Medicines list and for endorsing the national palliative care policy. And thank you Tanzania Association for Palliative Care for teaching me to prescribe opioids.

According to the International Narcotics Control Board, around 5.5 billion people in the world live in countries where there is limited or NO access to these medicines, which are essential for pain relief. Morphine, particularly oral morphine, is the gold standard of pain management according to WHO, and is unavailable to 75 per cent of the global population.

Inadequate access to such essential medicines violates Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights -- the right to medical care -- which also encompasses palliative care. The imbalance in the availability of opioids is particularly serious, as the latest data show that cancer, and other medical conditions that require controlled medicines, are increasing in ALL low- and middle-income countries.

We not only need to improve rational availability of prescribed opioids – we need to include on the job training in prescribing for nurses, physicians, pharmacists, and front line medics.

The International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care works closely with our focal points in the Medicines and Service Delivery and Safety Divisions of WHO to help member states improve access. We also partner with regional and national palliative care associations to convene education and training workshops on the rational use of medical opioids. We advocate for balanced regulatory systems and strengthened supply chains in order to prevent misuse and diversion.

IAHPC is standing by to assist member states in balancing their drug policies to ensure improved access to internationally controlled essential medicines as per the recommendations of Chapter 2 of the 2016 UNGASS Outcome Document.

I thank you.