

HelpAge Cambodia Intervention: Long Term Care and Palliative Care

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Older people have the right to care and support and palliative wherever they live.

Most older people in my community do not know what long term care or palliative care are. These kinds of services seem to be absent or not available yet in our community and country.

In Cambodia, we have a traditional culture and family structure of provision of care for older people in the family. The family is the main caregiver and provider of both long term care and palliative care. However these days, these kinds of support only exist in some families, the larger ones, but not the smaller, nuclear families since more and more of the younger generation have migrated to work, particularly in the rural areas.

Palliative care services are also unavailable for older people in my community, even for those with cancer, and older people are living in unnecessary pain.

A 62-year-old widow who is a member of my Older People's Association told me that she has had breast cancer for almost two years. She cannot afford to go to the capital city for treatment and has no access to palliative care, including pain medication. Her children have migrated to Thailand for work and have left their two small children with her to care for.

She said "I don't have enough money to afford daily living expenses for me and my grandchildren. How can I go and pay the hospital? And I didn't even know what kind of care service or treatment for my disease that I can access in my local health center or hospital. These days, I take traditional medicine. I need the state to provide free medical care for me."

In another case, an 85-year-old man was severely injured in a motorbike accident. When his wife could not afford to pay for his treatment, the doctors made him leave the hospital. He remained unconscious at home with no palliative care until he passed away a few days later. His wife told me, "Our small retirement pensions are not enough to cover the cost of this treatment."

Older people in my community are living without the care and support they may need and in unnecessary pain and suffering because they have no access to palliative care.

This is why, on behalf of older people in my community and myself as an older person, we need international and national legal frameworks to protect our rights and our freedoms. We wish to be treated equally and have access to the same opportunities we had when we were young. We strongly hope to have a UN convention on the rights of older people in the very near future.