Media release

World's first index on the quality of end of life care highlights the global barriers to achieving universal palliative care

A report published today (14 July) by the Economist Intelligence Unit shows the huge disparity in the quality of care for people with life-limiting and terminal illnesses across the globe.

The ‘Quality of Death’ index, commissioned by Singapore based The Lien Foundation, measures the current end of life care environments across 40 countries.

The index ranks the UK and Australia as providing the world’s best ‘quality of death’, while countries such as Italy and South Korea are ranked much lower. The report identifies poor access to pain relief, a lack of palliative care at national policy level and cultural taboos as the main barriers to countries providing a good ‘quality of death’ and thus good quality of life at the end of life.

The Worldwide Palliative Care Alliance (WPCA) welcomes today's report for giving an important snapshot of the impact of palliative care around the world.

As a contributor to the report, Cynthia Goh, Co-chair of the WPCA, comments:

“This is the first time a ranking of end of life care globally has been attempted. While it is encouraging to see countries such as the UK meeting the needs of people facing the end of the life, this report highlights the huge barriers that remain to us achieving universal access to palliative care.

“While more than 100 million patients and family care-givers worldwide need palliative care every year, less than eight per cent actually receive it. Palliative care is a human right, yet there are millions of people, especially in the developing world, dying in pain and distress every year.”

The report highlights drug availability as the most important practical issue in delivering good end-of-life care, as well as recognises how palliative care can reduce health spending. Cynthia Goh explains:

“Pain control is one of the central elements of palliative care, enabling people to have a quality of life before their death. Accessing opioids, such as morphine, remains a struggle in many countries, with an estimate five billion people unable to access opioids. The main obstacles we have to overcome are governments’ excessive concerns around illicit drug use, as well as a lack of training for doctors and nurses on how to administer these drugs.

“Despite what people may think the majority of hospice and palliative care is provided in people's own homes. And as the report highlights by increasing
the proportion of community and home based care, palliative care can reduce costs associated with hospital stays and emergency admissions”

Cynthia Goh concludes:

“Thanks to reports like this, it is finally being recognised that patients and their carers have a right to physical, emotional and spiritual pain relief through the course of their illness. With a rapidly aging global population we must now turn our attention to how countries can implement services in order to meet the ever growing demand for palliative care.”

For more information about the Quality of Death Report visit: www.qualityofdeath.org

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About the Worldwide Palliative Care Alliance (WPCA)

The WPCA is an alliance of national and regional hospice and palliative care organisations, bringing together people around the world with a shared vision of universal access to quality palliative care.

WPCA activities are carried out by a number of workgroups chaired in different national associations and with members from around the world, as follows:

- Advocacy – Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association
- World Hospice Palliative Care Day sub group, France
- Education and Training – Hospice Palliative Care Association, South Africa
- International Children’s Palliative Care Network (ICPCN) – Hospice Palliative Care Association, South Africa
- Policy – African Palliative Care Association, Uganda
- Quality and Standards - National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, USA
- Research - Palliative Care Australia