Palliative care consultation response to the draft WHO global action plan on the public health response to dementia 2017-2025

October 15 2016

African Palliative Care Association

Asociación Latinoamericana de Cuidados Paliativos

European Association of Palliative Care

Human Rights Watch

International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care (IAHPC)

International Children’s Palliative Care Network

UICC

Worldwide Hospice Palliative Care Alliance (WHPCA)

For more information on this submission, please contact:

Claire Morris, Worldwide Hospice Palliative Care Alliance
cmorris@thewhpca.org
+44 (0) 7843271402

Katherine Pettus, International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care
kpettus@iahpc.com
1. **Summary**

We welcome the publication of the Draft WHO global action plan on the public health response to dementia 2017-2025 and the opportunity to participate in the consultation. While we welcome the inclusion of care throughout the document, we are extremely concerned with the absence of any explicit reference to palliative care. In summary, we would like to raise the following points:

1. **We register our concern about the absence of any explicit reference to palliative care within the draft action plan and request this is rectified with the addition of strong language on palliative care as outlined in section 2 of this document.**

2. **According to WHA resolution 67.19, the WHO Secretary General is requested “to ensure that palliative care is an integral component of all relevant global disease control and health system plans, including those relating to noncommunicable diseases and universal health coverage, as well as being included in country and regional cooperation plans;”**

3. **Palliative care is a fundamental component of the continuum of care for people living with Alzheimer’s and other dementias from early in the course of the condition until the end-of-life, including supporting carers throughout and into bereavement stages. Alzheimer’s and other dementias are recognised as conditions that require palliative care in the WHO and WHPCA Global Atlas on Palliative Care at the End of Life published in 2014.**

4. **While a palliative care approach has been recognised as applicable for people living with Alzheimer’s and other dementias from early in the course of the condition, there is a need to undertake further research to provide recommendations on when and how palliative care may be most relevant.**

5. **Globally over 315,000 of the total number of people who die of Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias each year require palliative care at the end of life. However, this figure does not include those living with dementia who die from other conditions and would benefit from palliative care nor those who are not at the end of life but may be living with pain and other symptoms.**

6. **Palliative care offers various critical interventions for people living with dementia including addressing their physical, psychosocial and spiritual issues, supporting carers and family members and providing support for advance care planning from early in the course of the condition through to the end of life to improve quality of life. People with dementia have specific palliative care needs.**

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1. WHA resolution strengthening of palliative care as a component of comprehensive care through the life course

For more information on this submission, contact cmorris@thewhpca.org or kpettus@iahpc.com
7. The palliative care needs of people with dementia are often poorly addressed, symptoms such as pain are under-treated and many people are over-subjected to burdensome interventions. There is concern and increasing evidence that access to palliative care for people with dementia globally is inequitable.

8. Palliative care is one of the essential and basic health care services within Universal Health Coverage as outlined within the WHO definition.

9. Palliative care, including access to pain treatment, is explicitly recognised under the human right to health.

2. Suggested language and edits

2.1 We request the following paragraph is added following current paragraph 12.

“Palliative care is a core part of the continuum of care for people living with dementia from early in the course of the condition through to the end-of-life and into the bereavement stages for carers. It provides physical, psychosocial and spiritual support for people with dementia and their carers including support with advance care planning. A minimum of 315,000 people per year require palliative care at the end of life due to death from Alzheimer’s and other dementias. Many more require palliative care through the course of the condition, including when living with and dying from other co-morbidities.”

2.2 Throughout the text of the Global Plan we request that wherever ‘prevention, treatment and care’ is mentioned, it is followed by the text including palliative care. Unfortunately, we know from plans, strategies and resolutions on other issues that if palliative care is not explicitly mentioned, it is often neglected in the response. Alternatively, we request that the language prevention, treatment and care is replaced in line with Universal Health Coverage essential health care services to health promotion, prevention and treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care”

2.3 We request that additional language on palliative care is explicitly added to the following paragraphs in the draft Global Action Plan on Dementia. Suggested added text is highlighted in bold.

14. At the same time, the gap is wide between the need for prevention, treatment and care for dementia and the actual provision. Dementia is underdiagnosed worldwide, and, if a diagnosis is made, it is typically at a relatively late stage in the disease process. Long-term care pathways for people with dementia from early in the course of the illness until the end-of-life are frequently fragmented if not entirely lacking. Lack of awareness and understanding of dementia are often to blame, resulting in stigmatization and barriers to diagnosis and care. It is also widely recognized that people with dementia are frequently denied their human rights both in the community and in care homes.

18 e) Universal health coverage for dementia: There needs to be equitable access to a full range of health and social care services needed for people with dementia and their carers, regardless of age, gender,

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socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation. The full spectrum of essential, quality health services include health promotion, prevention and treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care.\(^\text{13}\)

56. Dementia is associated with complex needs and high levels of dependency and morbidity during the later stages, requiring a range of health services and long-term-care. These include identification, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, palliative care and other services such as home help, transport, food, services, and the provision of a structured day with meaningful activities.

58. A number of key principles are suggested for organizing and developing the health and long-term care system for dementia. These include, a timely diagnosis; the integration of dementia treatment and care into primary care; continuity of health and long-term care between different providers and system levels, quality palliative and end-of-life care, and active collaboration between paid and unpaid care providers.

61. Develop an efficient coordinated care pathway for dementia that is embedded in the health and social care system to link people with dementia to integrated, person-centred care as and when it is required. The pathway should combine multiple sectors including primary health care, specialist medical care, rehabilitation services, palliative care services, household help, food and transport services, meaningful activities and other social welfare services into a seamless bundle that enhances the capacity and functional ability of people with dementia.

66. Develop and implement guidelines, tools and training materials such as model curricula on dementia core competencies for health and long-term care workers in the field and provide technical support to Member States on ability-oriented, person-centred integrated long-term care provision from early in the course of the illness to the end-of-life.

93. If the incidence of dementia is to be reduced, and the lives of people with dementia are to be improved, research and innovation as well as their implementation in daily practice are crucial. It is important not only that funding and appropriate infrastructures for dementia research and innovation are available but also that mechanisms are in place that assist appropriate recruitment of people with dementia, their carers and families into research studies. A balance is required between research into prevention, treatment, care (including palliative care) and cure. Collaboration across Member States and all stakeholders to implement a coordinated strategic dementia global research agenda will increase the likelihood of effective progress toward better prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and care, including palliative care, for individuals around the world who are living with dementia.


For more information on this submission, contact cmorris@thewhpc.org or kpettus@iahpc.com
Appendix 1: Supporting evidence and documents

Additional selected evidence


Key UN statements, resolutions and reports

WHA resolution on palliative care - Strengthening of palliative care as a component of comprehensive care through the life course(WHA67.19) 14

Global Action Plan for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases 15

WHO and WHPCA Global Atlas on End of Life Care 16

UNGASS 2016 resolution entitled Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem 17

Civil society position statements and reports

WHPCA statement at the High Level Ministerial Meeting on Dementia (2015) 18


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**National strategies, reports and responses to dementia**

Nationally, progressive action plans and strategies strongly include palliative care to address the identified need but inclusion in policies and implementation of palliative care for people with dementia is inequitable.

**Australia**

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<tr>
<th>The National Framework for Action on Dementia 2015-2019 in Australia has accessing end of life and palliative care as one of the 7 areas of priority actions.</th>
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<td>Accessing appropriate end of life care and palliative care is essential for people with dementia and their carers, and the presence of an advance care plan may facilitate delivery of care that meets their expressed preferences. End of life care and palliative care have many aspects that are unique to people with dementia, specifically as a result of the disease trajectory of dementia which differs to that of many other chronic diseases.</td>
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**UK**

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<th>In September, 2016 Public Health England published a briefing report entitled ‘Dying With Dementia’. The report highlights the inequalities people with dementia face at-the-end of life in the UK.</th>
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<td>Recommendations from the report include focusing on dementia specific palliative services, improving the adoption and quality of advanced care planning and advocating GP led holistic reviews for more co-ordinated care.</td>
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<td>Alistair Burns, National Clinical Director for Dementia for NHS England and chair of the PHE’s DIN leadership group commented on the report “High Quality end of life care is a key aspect of the quality of dementia services.”</td>
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**Zimbabwe**

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<th>There is no dementia strategy in Zimbabwe. Island Hospice and Health Care Service, an NGO focussed on palliative care recognises the need for palliative care for people with dementia from the early in the course of the condition and encounters the need regularly in their day to day work. They would like to see dementia included in a national palliative care strategy and health care providers trained in palliative care for people with dementia as a priority.</th>
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<td>A case study “Recently we visited a 91-year-old man with dementia. He is restless and has occasional epileptic fits. His 82-year-old wife cannot cope and they have employed a nurse aid to assist but the aid is not trained to provide the care he needs and the patient is agitated. This then alarms his wife and family who feel he is in pain and they cannot cope. Island has been called on multiple occasions about this case because the family cannot cope with his restlessness. They live in an isolated area. We continue to provide the support they require but it is difficult in the absence of other social support.”</td>
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21 Public Health England (2016) Dying with Dementia. (produced by National Dementia Intelligence Network and National End of Life Care Intelligence Network)