

Taiwan Experience in Cancer Pain Control

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Cancer has always been the first leading cause of death in Taiwan since 1982. The cancer incidence is around 140/100,000. The number of cancer death is about 30,000 per year (31,554 in the year of 2000). Some preliminary surveys showed that 40-70% of cancer patients exposed to cancer pain. An official study revealed the fact that 69% of cancer pain had inadequate pain control even in a well-organized medical center.

Quite a few researches demonstrated the background of current cancer pain control in Taiwan. Regarding the physician-related barriers to pain control, they are listed as "inadequate knowledge" and "negative attitude". Intensified education in basic medical education and the residency or specialist training were then proposed. Some projects were also initiated to disclose the barriers of patients and family caregivers in cancer pain management. It was evident that pain management among them was inadequate. Misconceptions on that part of patients still existed. We found that family caregiver barriers (concern) were a significant predictor of inadequate management of cancer pain. They worried mostly about "induced tolerance" and "precipitated tolerance" by the painkillers. Those with higher levels of concerns used more inadequate analgesics. Therefore educational interventions to the caregivers were proposed. We also realized that there were some coping behaviors for our patients. Namely, they were medications, rest, tolerating, acupuncture, meditation and use of heat/cold. A lot of patients and family caregivers also took negative attitude toward narcotics. Around 50~60% of cancer patients took morphine (narcotics) in the in-patients unit of the medical center. There are still some obstacles on the way of cancer pain control.

Some foundations in Taiwan offered to educate patients and their families especially those of terminal illness. Department of Health (government) edited the "National Handbook of Cancer Pain Management" in 1993 and developed the "Taiwan Guideline of Pain Control for Hospice Palliative Care" in 1999. Several education handbooks and videotapes were also issued by the NGOs.