

## How to Improve Cancer Pain Control – A Systematic Approach

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Effective cancer pain control requires the knowledgeable cooperation of government, the health professions and the public. At national and regional levels, initiatives by authorities in regard to both policy and strategy are desirable to ensure provision of necessary education and resources which can relieve patients suffering cancer pain. Cooperation between professional organizations, advocacy groups and government is desirable in the development of policy and strategy. Examples from Australia will be briefly mentioned.

Policies recognise the impact of suffering from cancer pain on individuals, families and communities, and encourage better pain management through targeted funding, relevant administrative arrangements and innovative regulations which facilitate an appropriate use of pain management medications.

Strategy initiatives will make special provision for the employment of pain management specialists, the education of health professionals, the establishment of multi-disciplinary pain clinics and palliative care programs. Pain management is facilitated by rigorous monitoring of the use of analgesics in medicine, especially opioids, and the licensing of both public and private pharmacists to dispense them.

Universities, including schools of nursing, will include specific pain management courses within their health sciences curricula, and ensure that students have clinical exposure to cancer pain problems and palliative care. Research will be encouraged which not only investigates the fundamental problems of pain biology but also addresses the practical difficulties inherent in ensuring that comprehensive pain expertise is available when and where suffering patients need it.

Graduates in family practice, oncology and aged care have particular opportunities to manage cancer pain in accord with modern principles, and that should imply special responsibilities to be well informed about pain management and skilled in its practice.

Pain management has become increasingly sophisticated and specialised. But for most patients, quite simple approaches with basic therapies can make a substantial difference to comfort and function. The public needs both reassurance and education so that communities are better able to face the threat of advanced cancer with realism and courage, and take full advantage of the many measures which counter its dire potential for suffering.

Pain management is one aspect of palliative care, a wider field of clinical responsibility which extends to many other major symptoms associated with advanced illness. But pain remains the discomfort which causes most concern, and unless palliative care services are equipped to manage pain well, their important contribution to community fears about cancer and death is much diminished.