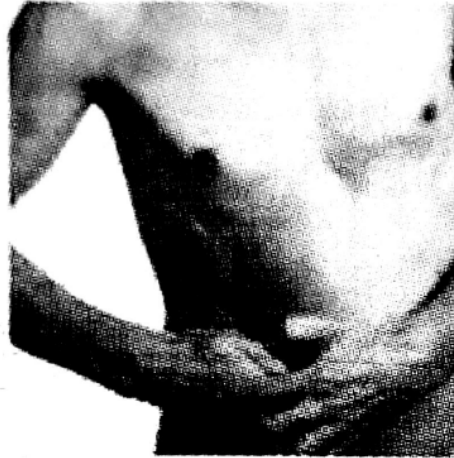


Ease access to cancer treatment

As Uganda Cancer Institute celebrates 50 years of cancer care and research in Uganda with a joint International Conference on Cancer and Palliative Care from August 23 to 25 themed: 'United against cancer: Prevention to end of life care,' it is important to discuss the multiple aspects of pain, especially that are associated with cancer.

One of the major concerns and beliefs by patients and families suffering from cancer is that pain will definitely occur and will be untreated or will be poorly controlled thus interfering with their quality of life. Pain is recognised as an important symptom and indicator of poor quality of life. It is so common and feared that it is the main reason patients buy prescription drugs and also over the counter medications. Furthermore, pain is a subjective, multidimensional symptom, which at its onset, is associated with the disease, but as it persists, it deprives one from engaging in their daily activities.

On top of its physical characteristics, pain also has social, spiritual and psychological factors. Holistic assessment and attention to these factors is important to its treatment. Chronic pain is devastating in all these aspects thus impacting negatively every aspect of life. It is difficult to make plans or commitments, as



one never knows when the pain will be so great that they cannot function.

The effects of cancer pain extend beyond the patient, to the family, the social cycle and other relations. The socioeconomic cost of pain is enormous both to the patients and families and also to the national or global economy. In one study, I did looking at working children of patients with cancer of the cervix for three months, more than 90 per cent reported missed financial commitments or incomplete projects; more than 75 per cent missed at least two social engagements; 40 per cent spent more than seven days from their families to visit or care for parents in pain, 20 per cent reported strained relationships and breakups and 8 per cent lost their jobs. To compound the problem, proper pain control is not usually achieved due to poor pain

assessment, lack of knowledge of particular characteristics of painkillers, inconsistent pain-killers intake, over the counter pain medications, fear of use of strong pain medications and lack of individualising pain treatment. Initiation of pain treatment early with the aim of timely control is an ultimate endeavour. The fear of addiction, dependence and tolerance to strong pain drugs is so common that some patients refuse to take these analgesics. There is need to use multi-pronged approach to actualise quality pain treatment.

Practitioners' knowledge on pain medications needs to be enhanced for proper prescription. Patients and families need to be educated so that they comprehend pain as an association of the disease and also understand that pain can be managed effectively and efficiently with drugs and non-drug modalities. Being proactive in educating patients about drug effects and the interventions to take when experiencing the same is an important assurance that the drugs are not dangerous. Internationally, access to pain medication, including effective and efficient pain management and treatment, is a human right that needs to be upheld.

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