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### **Presidential decree will improve pain relief in Panama**

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[http://www.hospicecare.com/news/09/07/regional\\_reports.html](http://www.hospicecare.com/news/09/07/regional_reports.html)

#### **ABOUT PANAMA**

A new presidential decree has been enacted in Panama that eliminates barriers to the availability of, and access to, opioids including those needed for pain relief. This is a major step in improving patient care in the developing world.

Liliana De Lima, Executive Director of IAHPC, stated, "This resulted because of the leadership of Dr. Rosa Buitrago, professor in the Universidad de Panama School of Pharmacy. It was part of her Action Plan developed for Panama as part of her Fellowship in the International Pain Policy Fellowship program at the Pain and Policy Studies Group/WHO Collaborating Center at the University of Wisconsin Carbone Cancer Center. This program is funded by the Open Society Institute, IAHPC serves as an advisor and also was Rosa's adviser."

The new decree which is now in force is good news for all patients suffering from chronic pain conditions, not only oncology patients.

The decree recognizes the need for opioids to manage cancer pain as well as for other conditions. In the past, opioids could only be prescribed by oncologists and anesthesiologists in Panama. This decree points out that the previous limits to the dosages and the number of days of prescription are inappropriate and interfere with care.

The changes in the law include:

- The expiration of the prescription is increased from 48 hrs to 5 days.
- Maximum days for parenteral dosages of opioids increased from 48 hrs to 5 days. Palliative care, pain, cancer and other specialists may prescribe for up to 15 days.
- Non-parenteral opioids: The limit of days was increased from 5 days to 15 days for General Practitioners. Palliative care, pain, cancer and other specialists may prescribe for up to 30 days.
- Group sessions to educate professionals about this important decree will begin soon. With the help of Dr. Garibaldo (chief of the Palliative Care unit at the National Institute of Oncology), we are planning to have a meeting at the Oncology Institute as a first step.

I express my gratitude to all of you who guided us to reach this important goal that will benefit so many patients in my country. This is a clear example that an Action Plan that is carefully designed and followed with input from experts can end in a positive result. If we consider all the possible difficulties there might have been, we (all of us) celebrate this result in a very short time.

Again, thank you all for this!

Kind regards,  
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