

Ministry of Health Increases Advocacy for Improved Pain Management & Palliative Care



Monday, 15 November 2010 19:10

Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Sheila Campbell Forrester says the Ministry of Health is placing more focus on pain management and palliative care especially as the prevalence of chronic diseases increases. Dr. Campbell Forrester was speaking this morning at the Pain Policy Meeting and Workshop held under the theme: “Ministry of Health Moving Forward with Pain and Palliative Care in Jamaica.” at the Alhambra Inn in Kingston.

“Cancers are among the five leading causes of death, accidents among the top ten leading causes and both are associated with chronic pain. Other conditions such as HIV/AIDS and chronic back pain are also of concern. It is significant that we holistically treat these persons especially with a view to reduce pain as their conditions can result in reduced quality of life and loss of productivity,” said Dr. Campbell Forrester. She added that more and more persons in the most productive age group are presenting with these conditions and are involved in motor vehicle accidents, which may result in intense pain.

“Pain management and palliative care must address patient and family discomfort and restore persons to their productivity level. It is important that we understand new methods of pain management and prevent misuse. Opioids are important and effective and we have to examine the policies and legal framework surrounding their use as we may need to adjust them to allow us greater flexibility and protect the health worker,” she said.

Meanwhile, Oncologist at the Hope Institute, Dr. Dingle Spence says Jamaica falls short of international trends in the use of opioids. She says a survey conducted by the Jamaica Pain Collaborative in 2009 indicates some possible reasons for the inadequate use of opioids especially in cancer treatment. They include inadequate education and the need for training, physicians’ reluctance to prescribe opioids and nurses reluctance to administer them as well as the belief that they may become addictive if used to treat pain.

Dr. Spence says steps are being taken to address these issues as the team has been conducting education sessions across the island over the last few years. She added that concerns about addiction may not be warranted. “People in pain who do not have a prior history of addiction rarely become addicted to opioids. It is considerably less of a problem than we think it is. This myth that when you take opioids for a long time you will become addicted has negatively affected health care practice and the use of opioids,” she explained.

The Pain and Policy Studies Group, a WHO Collaborating Centre for Pain and Palliative Care, University of Wisconsin, has awarded an International Pain and Policy Fellowship to two employees of the Ministry of Health. Their remit is to improve the access and availability of opioid analgesics and provision of palliative care in Jamaica.

The management of pain and palliative care is an important focus of the Ministry of Health. Many international bodies now regard access to pain relief as an essential human right. The World Health Organization recently estimated that 5.5 million people with terminal cancer and vast numbers with unintentional and violence related injuries are not receiving the pain relief they need.

-30-

Contact: MOH, Public Relations Unit Tel: 967-1561