

# Pain & Policy Studies Group • International Pain Policy Fellowship



KYRGYZSTAN

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For further information on Kyrgyzstan:  
<http://www.painpolicy.wisc.edu/country/profile/kyrgyzstan>

## BACKGROUND:

In recent years, the Open Society Foundations, an international non-governmental organization, began an effort to systematically assess the palliative care needs in Kyrgyzstan, including opioid availability, and has engaged with the Government to begin to address the identified challenges. These efforts have led to initial progress including the development of a National Palliative Care Strategy, a Ministry of Health (MoH) Palliative Care Working Group to implement the strategy, MoH approved National Clinical Guidelines and a Clinical Protocol for pain management.

In 2012, Dr. Sabyrbekova, a physician specializing in communicable diseases, with a PhD, was selected as the PPSG fellow for Kyrgyzstan. She founded Ergene, a non-governmental organization that seeks to educate women on breast cancer prevention and early detection, in 2006. Two-thirds of breast cancer patients in Kyrgyzstan see a doctor for treatment only when they are in late, usually final, stages of the disease. For these individuals, access to pain medication is especially important. Ergene became the first organization in Kyrgyzstan to promote palliative care and adequate access to pain medications for breast cancer patients. Guided by Dr. Sabyrbekova's leadership, Ergene was a founding member of the Palliative Care Union when it was formed in 2011 and was instrumental in the development of the national palliative care strategy with the Ministry of Health.

Prior to the fellowship only injectable morphine was approved for use in Kyrgyzstan and oral morphine was not available. Several regulatory barriers to opioid availability and accessibility could be found in both Kyrgyz Republic legislation and resolutions, requiring complex paperwork for prescribing opioid medications, which has deterred physicians from prescribing morphine to patients.

## FELLOWSHIP SUCCESSES:

Dr. Sabyrbekova and her colleagues worked diligently during her fellowship to complete the registration process for oral morphine. After many months of preparation, immediate release oral morphine 5 mg, 10 mg was finally registered in early January 2015.

In 2012 the first National Guidelines for Palliative Care and the first Pain Relief Clinical Protocol were adopted by the MoH in Kyrgyzstan. These documents are being distributed among primary healthcare specialists during continuing medical education courses.

Oral morphine is also now listed on the State Guarantee Program for cancer patients with reimbursement by the government at about 97% percent of the cost.

Throughout her fellowship, Dr. Sabyrbekova produced several informational materials for patients, including newspaper articles, TV programs and even a social theater production entitled *The Right to Life without Pain*.

## ONGOING PROGRESS:

Once oral morphine was successfully registered, work was initiated to import the first 1 kg of morphine. In March 2015 oral morphine arrived in Kyrgyzstan and following the testing of oral morphine tablets the product has begun to be distributed to two pilot palliative care programs in Bishkek and Osh. The tablets are being used regularly and healthcare staff report that it has made a major improvement in pain control in their patient populations. Dr. Sabyrbekova continues to explore the possibility of registering and importing additional formulations of opioids and will contribute to the calculation of the required amounts of opioids to estimate future needs.

The “Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic on Palliative Care” included an objective to clarify existing policy provisions on the use of opioids in palliative care and to eliminate any possible conflicts with their prescription, delivery, distribution and use. In 2014 several meetings were conducted including the MoH, Ministry of Interior, Office on Drug Control, National Oncology Center, and the Kyrgyz State Medical Institute for Continuing Education to analyze the legislation and regulations related to registration, distribution, storage, prescription and use of controlled medicines. As a result, several amendments were recommended, such as increase the quantity of oral morphine ampoules allowed per prescription form from 20 to 60 and reduce the number of stamps required on each prescription form. These recommendations were sent to the Government for their review and new legislation on opioid access passed in 2015. The MoH is now working on a governmental decree on opioid prescribing to implement the legislation.

Dr. Sabyrbekova has been involved in continuing cancer awareness programs and is planning a month-long campaign with an emphasis on breast cancer awareness, palliative care and the right to pain relief and will include an event on World Hospice and Palliative Care Day.

Dr. Sabyrbekova is working on establishing a second pilot home based palliative care project in Bishkek. She will also develop a new NGO that will become the official National Palliative Care Association for Kyrgyzstan.

## CHALLENGES AND FUTURE NEEDS:

Education and training continue to be needed for healthcare workers and patients in Kyrgyzstan. Receiving oral morphine in the country is only part of the solution to ensuring access for patients in need. Doctors and pharmacists need to be willing to prescribe and fill prescriptions; patients need to be aware of the uses and benefits of opioid medications. Also, challenges remain with regard to the cost of oral morphine for patients with less advanced cancer or other diseases. Palliative care advocates are continuing to work with the mandatory health insurance fund and the pharmacies to address this issue.



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