

Pain & Policy Studies Group • International Pain Policy Fellowship



SUDAN

Nahla Gafer, MD
Fellow 2014-2015
Radiation & Isotope Center Khartoum (RICK)



For further information on Sudan:

<http://www.painpolicy.wisc.edu/country/profile/sudan>

BACKGROUND:

Prior to the Fellowship, palliative care services were only beginning to be developed and oral morphine was not widely available in Sudan. In fact, oral morphine was only available at two hospitals in the capital, Khartoum, requiring patients who live outside the capitol to travel long distances to access it. Unfortunately, the 2 hospitals that had oral morphine experienced frequent stock-outs and had cumbersome prescription procedures, requiring multiple trips to the pharmacy which poses barriers to patients accessing oral morphine.

Dr. Nahla Gafer, a clinical oncologist at the Radiation & Isotope Center Khartoum (RICK), was instrumental in the early development of palliative care in Sudan. She attended the Initiators Course at Hospice Africa Uganda (HAU) in 2009 with partial support from the International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care (IAHPC). Following an advocacy visit from Dr. Anne Merriman, and the continuous active support of nurse Esther Walker (who later received the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in 2012), the first palliative care unit was opened at the RICK in 2010.

Dr. Gafer observed the growth of the palliative care unit with support from international palliative care organizations: IAHPC, African Palliative Care Association, HAU, International Children's Palliative Care Network offering traveling scholarships and sending experts for training in palliative care in Sudan. They also received local funds that helped sustain the unit. They managed to maintain a daily out-patient clinic and an in-patient unit. Having enrolled about 1,600 patients in the palliative care program, they are still struggling with funds and personnel with the hospital administration.

In 2014, Dr. Gafer was selected as a Fellow to improve access to opioids in Sudan. She was accompanied by Ms. Alia Al-Mahdi, a pharmacist at RICK who was also a consultant with the Ministry of Health (MoH).

FELLOWSHIP SUCCESSES:

Dr. Gafer and colleagues were successful in simplifying the burdensome prescription process and extending the operating hours for the pharmacy at RICK.

Additionally, she worked with government and institutional officials to ensure access to oral morphine tablets at two additional hospitals which previously had none. Progress with additional hospitals is also underway.

Dr. Gafer reported that the MoH had a newly established a budget-line for 2015 as part of the Cancer Control Program in the Non-Communicable Disease department with the intent to address barriers to pain management. The MoH planned to do so through the following mechanisms: (a) holding weekly meetings of pain/palliative care experts with government officials; (b) situational analysis of current pain and palliative care programs; (c) government-directed survey of Directors of Hospitals and Clinics for pain and palliative care needs for all diseases; (d) pilot efforts to improve palliative care and pain management guidelines, including guidelines for opioids and to ensure good practice policies across health centers.

Dr. Gafer continued to support the palliative care efforts at another hospital in Khartoum, Soba University Hospital (SUH), offering consultant visits and mentoring the staff. At the 700 beds, patients with palliative care needs were treated by a well-trained medical officer and nurse. SUH witnessed improved access to oral morphine with the APPF program.

Simultaneously, efforts are underway to expand palliative care services throughout the country and educate health professionals about pain relief and the rational use and safe handling of essential controlled medicines. In 2014, a once-monthly program to provide palliative care training to different health professionals was approved by the Ministry of Higher Education which will help reduce barriers and fears about use of opioids. In 2015, the National Cancer Institute, at Wad Medani, opened a palliative care clinic, also supported by Dr. Gafer, who inaugurated the vehicles donated by JICA and the Home-Care Palliative Care Services on 19 October 2015.

Additionally pain and palliative care training initiatives have been ongoing since 2010, in collaboration with HAU and Makerere University. In particular Comboni College of Science and Technology was a local partner in those trainings and in July 2014 received the recognition of the Ministry of Higher Education as a provider of palliative care education. In conjunction with this, Dr. Gafer led "the first Palliative Care for Pediatrics" workshop in May 2013; the "Palliative Care in Oncology" course in July 2014; and "Pain Management for 100 Health Professionals" in January 2015. The latter had participants from 22 different hospitals in Khartoum state. The training involves teams of providers composed of physicians, pharmacists, nurses and at least one registrar or consultant (official prescribers for opioids).

ONGOING PROGRESS:

In 2014, Dr. Gafer received the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) - International Development and Education Award in Palliative Care, which connects oncologists from low- and middle-income countries with ASCO member in the USA or Canada who serve as mentors. Also, in 2014, she was awarded funding from the International Association for the Study of Pain to support the training for 100 health professionals in Khartoum. Many of the individuals involved in the training program set up by Dr. Gafer expressed interest in establishing palliative care and pain management services within their hospitals.

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE NEEDS:

While access to oral morphine is increasing within Khartoum, it is still localized within that state. There is a need to expand access to the other major cities as well as to rural areas throughout the country.

PUBLICATIONS:

- Cancer in Sudan: palliative care is the most rapid way to less suffering - <http://www.smj.eg.net/inner/article.aspx?aid=81>
- Palliative Care to the Cancer Patient: The Middle East as a Model for Emerging Countries - https://www.novapublishers.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=49196
- Progress and Education in Palliative Care in Sudan - <http://www.ehospice.com/ArticleView/tabid/10686/ArticleId/5791/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>
- Palliative care for cancer patients in Sudan: an overview - <http://ecancer.org/special-issues/6-palliative-care-in-africa.php>



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