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### **“Palliative Care in Kurdistan Region, Iraq”**

**Region overview:** Kurdistan Region of Iraq consisting of 3 Northern Governorates with Kurdish population of more than 6 million and capital Erbil. The new Iraqi constitution recognizes the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) as the legitimate government of the Kurds, and allows it to continue to exist within the new federal state.

**Health System Overview:** During the Saddam Hussein, 80% of Iraq’s health system was run by the government and available to Iraqi citizens for little or no money. The system had a curative, rather than prevention-oriented focus. Today the KRG provides health care via Ministry of Health (MOH).

#### **Cancer Services and Palliative Care:**

Cancer is a considerable health problem in Kurdistan Region. Breast cancer among women, lung cancer among men and leukemia among children are the most frequently diagnosed cancers. The majority of cancer patients are in advanced stages of cancer at the time of diagnosis and have limited or no access to cancer treatment. There are no facilities equipped to treat patients with cancer and there are no oncologists available. Although the only realistic treatment options for the cancer patients are pain relief and palliative care, the services, guidelines and policies are not in place.

**Ministry of Health Initiatives:** MOH, KRG has initiated palliative care services and policy development as a part of Cancer Control Initiatives: consultant-specialist in Palliative Care was invited to help with the need assessment and policy development, and budget was allocated for the year 2006 for the development of Palliative Care Program.