

Palliative Care – The Indian Scene

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India

India with its population of more than a billion is a country with enormous variations in language, culture and socio economic situation. This diversity is reflected in palliative care also. Palliative Care in India has a history of more than two decades. But it has been estimated that only less than 3% of patients with advanced cancer and around 1% of patients with all incurable diseases have access to any palliative care service. When the country is taken as a whole, the coverage is very patchy. There are a total of less than 130 units in the whole country. They include hospices, hospital based units, out patient clinics, home care programs and community based programs.

The small south Indian state of Kerala stands different from the other regions in India. More than 50% all palliative care units in India are concentrated in this region with a population around 3% of the total. All except a few of these units in Kerala are part of a network called Neighbourhood Network in Palliative Care characterized by massive community participation. This social experiment on community participation in palliative care which has ensured palliative care coverage of 60 -80% for the first time anywhere in a developing country has a lot of lessons to offer to the rest of the world.