

PALLIATIVE CARE OF CANCER PATIENTS IN TURKEY.

According to 2000 census, total population of Turkey is 67 803 927 with an average density of 88 inhabitants per square kilometre, where 64.9% of the residents live in urban areas. The demographic profile of Turkey is relatively young when compared to other European countries. 32.3% of the total population is under the age of 15 and only 4.8% are over the age of 65 (1995). Life expectancy at birth during the period of 1972 to 2000 increased from 57.6 to 69.1 years (1).

Health services in Turkey are provided mainly by the Ministry of Health, SSK (Social Insurance Organization), Universities, the Ministry of Defence, and private physicians, dentists, and pharmacists, nurses and other health professionals. Private hospitals are open to everybody which could afford the expenses which are high in case compared with the average income of Turkish citizens (1).

Cancer has emerged as a significant health problem in Turkey and is the second-leading cause of death. There has been an almost three-fold increase in cancer incidence in Turkey in the period 1983-1999, with the number of reported cases increasing from 9,868 to 24,650 during the period(3,4).

At the moment there is no national policy and no national guidelines for palliative care in Turkey. Supportive care with hospice/ palliative care is linked to the development of other services, particularly within hospital based oncology units. There are no specialist palliative care services in Turkey. Pain control and symptom relief are provided as a part of general clinical practice, mainly in medical oncology units and departments of algology(2).

The Turkish Oncology Group, established in 1989, initiated a section on palliative care training and development in the late 1990s. The Group dedicated a conference to the continuing development of palliative care in Turkey. The conference was co-sponsored and supported by MASCC (2). Turkey joined the Middle East Cancer Consortium (MECC) at a signing ceremony in Ankara in 2003. MECC has been holding workshops on palliative care (5).

There are a number of medical oncologists and pain specialists involved in developing palliative care education and training within existing hospital oncology and pain units. There are no national guidelines or government financed support for palliative care services.

As of 2005, there are no specialist palliative care physicians, nurses or related

professionals in Turkey. Hospice policies do not exist. Home care is private, and only paid by private insurance, some only for the last 2 months preceding death.

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