

PRESS RELEASE

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**THE IRISH HOSPICE FOUNDATION CALLS FOR CONTINUED
INVESTMENT IN HOSPICE SERVICES ON
WORLD HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE CARE DAY 2007**

In a statement issued over the weekend to mark **World Hospice and Palliative Care Day**, the Irish Hospice Foundation (IHF) has called for continued investment in the development of hospice/palliative services in Ireland to ensure that more people have access to quality end-of-life care in all settings – homes, hospitals and hospices.

The call was made to mark the third annual World Hospice and Palliative Care Day on **Saturday, October 6th**. The theme this year was *Across the Ages: From Children to Older People*. It highlighted that people of all ages need access to hospice and palliative care, either as patients or as loved ones or carers.

While much progress has been made in the development of hospice services in Ireland, much remains to be done to ensure a quality service is available to children and to non-cancer patients, and to provide supports for carers.

Eugene Murray, CEO of the IHF, stated: "This has been a significant year for the Irish Hospice Foundation. We have launched a new five-year initiative called the *Hospice Friendly Hospitals Programme* which aims to put hospice principles into hospital practice. We are also working to extend hospice services to non-cancer patients and to develop appropriate services for children."

He continued: "There have been many developments in Ireland in recent years. We have an agreed policy on hospice/palliative care and we know where the deficiencies are in the service. All we need now is to develop an agreed implementation timeframe with multi-annual funding to ensure that policy is appropriately resourced."

He concluded: "World Hospice and Palliative Care Day allows us to reflect on the significant challenges that are faced in ensuring that everyone has access to hospice services and particularly to pain relief. Half of the world's 234 countries have no palliative care services available to their populations, and one third have yet to take the first steps in planning to build service capacity."

A new international report called *Access to Pain Relief – an Essential Human Right* was recently published to mark World Hospice and Palliative Care Day. In 2006, the World Health Organisation estimated that **80% of the world's cancer sufferers have no access to pain relief** and 7% of all people in the world suffer cancer pain that could be relieved but is not treated.

The report, which also looked at pain relief with reference to other advanced and terminal diseases, including AIDS, heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and renal disease, was produced by the UK's national hospice charity, *Help the Hospices*. It provided a global snapshot of the availability of vital pain-relieving drugs. It looked in detail at why so many people do not have access to basic drugs named on the World Health Organisations' 'Essential Medicines' list.

The report also contained the findings of a specially commissioned survey of medical staff in 69 hospice and palliative care services across Africa, Asia and Latin America. They revealed that the main barriers to access were not cost, but rather lack of education and training; bureaucracy; excessively strict legislation; misplaced fear of addiction, abuse, tolerance and/or or side effects; and poorly developed health systems. In fact, medicines used to relieve pain are well established, with known, predictable and preventable side effects.

Survey findings

The survey only looked at the availability of pain relieving drugs within the hospice and palliative care services surveyed. However, the actual level of access is far lower than the survey indicated, as the vast majority of people living in the survey countries do not have access to palliative care of any kind.

Key survey findings included:

- In one main hospital in Malawi, aspirin was the only pain killer which was 'always available'. Aspirin is not recommended for children, therefore there are no suitable pain killers available for children.
- Professional training for 82% of the palliative care workers in Latin America and 71% in Asia did not include either pain relief or opioid use.
- 25% of palliative care providers in Asia, 35% in Latin America, and 39% in Africa cannot always access a strong opioid.
- For 41% of palliative care providers in Africa and 39% in Latin America oral morphine is not always available, and for 18% and 21% respectively oral morphine is never available.
- Over 20% of palliative care providers in Africa never have access to strong opioids.

The Help the Hospices report recommended that in order to prevent millions from suffering pain needlessly, there should be coordinated international and national programmes to increase awareness, education, supply and access. Palliative care and access to essential pain-relieving medicines should be an integral part of all national policies relating to cancer, HIV/AIDS and other chronic diseases.

It is estimated that 100 million people could benefit from basic palliative care every year. This number is made up of 33 million people dying (60% of the total number dying in the world each year) and their 66 million family members, companions or carers (based on a conservative estimate of two people giving care and support for every person that dies). The actual number of people who receive palliative care is far lower.

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Notes to editors

- The report is available to download in full at http://www.worldday.org/documents/access_to_pain_relief.pdf .