

PCAU PARTNERSHIP NEWSLETTER

Special Announcement: COVID-19 Update

Since the second national lockdown was announced in June, Uganda's Ministry of Health has embarked on an aggressive strategy to stop the virus spread and save lives. They have set up COVID-19 treatment units in major urban settings to help with the overwhelming numbers of cases. They are also working with development partners to increase oxygen production so patients in need are able to get it.

The current lockdown goes to the end of July, and the president is expected to address the nation soon on the progress in their COVID-19 fight and the way forward. The pandemic continues to hit Uganda hard, but the past few weeks have seen lower numbers of new COVID-19 cases.

As of July 25, Uganda has registered 92,795 cases and 2,590 deaths. A total of 1.1 million doses of vaccine have been administered – with less than 1% of the country's 44.3 million people fully vaccinated. Uganda does not have an adequate supply of vaccines, but they are trickling in. Another shipment of less than one million doses should arrive next month. You can follow updates from the Ministry of Health here: <https://www.health.go.ug/covid/>

Supporting Advanced Training in Palliative Care for Nurses

The Center for Hospice Care/Hospice Foundation (CHC/HF) and Palliative Care Association of Uganda (PCAU) partnership focuses on enhancing access to hospice and palliative care in Uganda, with special attention toward training health care workers. PCAU has a mandate to work with the Ministry of Health (MoH) to strengthen health services provision – and having palliative care trained health workers is crucial for that to succeed. The advanced diploma in palliative care nursing (ADPCN), launched in 2019, is helping make important strides toward this goal.



Former PCAU country director Rose Kiwanuka instructs the nurses of the inaugural ADPCN class.



A cake cutting ceremony to recognize the inaugural class of ADPCN students.

Uganda has a tremendous need for hospice and palliative care services. It's a country the size of Oregon, with a population that is ten times greater. The median age is 17 while life expectancy is 63 years. The country has an estimated doctor-to-patient ratio of 1:25,000 and the nurse-to-patient ratio of 1:11,000. As of 2018, it was estimated that there were fewer than 200 clinical palliative care practitioners available to provide care to an estimated 255,000 patients in need. According to the 2017 *Lancet* Commission report, *Alleviating the access abyss in palliative care and pain relief – [is] an imperative of universal health coverage, yet only 11% of those who are in need of pain control and palliative care in Uganda can access it.* The country's Health Sector Development Plan 2015/16 – 2019/20 showed that palliative care services are offered in only 4.8% of the public hospitals in the country. The partnership knew that supporting the education of student nurses would be crucial to building the palliative care expertise in the country. So early in the partnership, CHC/HF and PCAU included a capacity-building initiative of education, training, and mentorship for health and non-health palliative care workers.

"I chose to undertake this diploma because of the experience I have of seeing a patient with advanced cancer of the breast crying on ward day and night with a lot of pain. Maybe there was poor management of pain. This inspired me to undertake this to get more skill of managing pain of such patients."

*Eunice Kiconco,
Nurse in the inaugural class of ADPCN students*

In 2010, CHC/HF began sponsoring nursing students to undertake a one-year clinical palliative care course offered by the Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care in Africa (IHPCA), a private institution recognized by the Ugandan government. While the training program was excellent, they graduated about 15 students per year – not nearly enough to meet the estimated need for palliative care services in the country. PCAU continued to lobby the government to integrate a similar course into its public nursing schools with the aim of increasing the number students and thus, increasing access to palliative care.



The 2020-2021 cohort of nurses being trained in the ADPCN program.



Dr. Anne Merriman meets with the inaugural ADPCN students.



The inaugural ADPCN students were presented with laptops donated by CHC/HF.

From 2010 – 2018, CHC supported 62 nurse students through the clinical palliative care course offered at IHPCA. In 2019, due to the tireless efforts of PCAU, the government started an ADPCN at its largest nursing school, Mulago School of Nursing and Midwifery (MSNM). The program has the capacity for approximately 60 students per year. As a large government institution, the course could also be offered at a lower cost for students. CHC/HF supported 25 students in the inaugural class in 2019.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of all institutes of higher learning for a good part of the year, no students started the course in 2020. In March of this year, a small group of students started the course, and another intake is scheduled for later this year. The ADPCN program continued to support the students over the past year – sometimes with informal lectures and learning and sometimes with training and support in their places of work while school was out of session. While pandemic disruptions continue, the inaugural cohort is set to graduate in October 2021. Despite the bumpy launch of the program due to COVID-19, this is an enormous accomplishment for PCAU and for the country as they seek to build palliative care service provision to truly reach all in need in Uganda.

In March 2021, the MoH announced a new directive that all public hospitals *must* allocate space for a palliative care unit in their hospital. This is another result of advocacy by PCAU and other palliative care stakeholders in Uganda who were able to convince the MoH that Universal Health Coverage cannot be attained unless palliative care is embraced along with preventive, promotive, curative, and rehabilitative services.

PCAU's capacity-building efforts are more important than ever in light of this new directive. Trained staff will be needed at each of the new palliative care units. PCAU and the MoH are close partners in these efforts. CHC/HF is proud to support this incredibly important work! Hospice Foundation Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Mike Wargo appreciates seeing the partnership with the MoH develop: "This is a nice recognition of all the hard work we've (PCAU and CHC/HF) put in all these years. It's great to see that our resources are not going to waste. This structure ensures sustainability for training in the future."

PCAU Staff Highlight

Margret Kabajungu works as a general assistant and storekeeper at PCAU and holds a certificate in catering and hotel management. She has worked with PCAU for the last 10 years. She is responsible for maintaining a high standard of cleanliness within the office, preparing refreshments for staff and guests, and ensuring the availability of necessary kitchen supplies. In 2017, she took on the additional responsibility of storekeeping where she is in charge of the store department.



She loves seeing PCAU fulfilling its vision of delivering palliative care for all in need in Uganda. This can be seen in the growing services that PCAU offers nationwide and the effort to make sure each person understands what palliative care is.

Margaret is always friendly and helpful to the CHC/HF staff during our exchange visits to Uganda, and we sincerely appreciate her efforts to make us feel welcome!

PCAU 2020 Annual Report

This report highlights the amazing work of PCAU in the face of the pandemic. Read about how PCAU has continued to increase access to culturally appropriate palliative care through strengthening health care systems in Uganda and in collaboration with partners.



Help Support PCAU Continue Their Crucial Work

Your gift to our COVID-19 Safety Appeal for PCAU will help the staff stay safe as they continue to support the delivery of palliative care in the country by helping purchase PPE, COVID-19 testing and other crucial supplies.

Donate to the COVID-19 Safety Appeal



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