



LIFE ASKED DEATH DOCUMENTARY TO DEBUT IN SRI LANKA IN CONJUNCTION WITH WORLD HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE DAY

Documentary reveals the challenges and triumphs of bringing palliative care¹ to Sri Lanka & how pain relief eludes the dying

Living and dying in pain: it doesn't have to happen

COLOMBO, XX XXX 2016

Sri Lanka, a country with a population of 21 million people, has few trained specialists in palliative care but help is at hand.

Under the auspice of the Lien Collaborative for Palliative Care project, several volunteer healthcare experts are working closely with Sri Lankans eager to learn about palliative care which focuses on relieving and preventing the suffering of patients, especially those trying to cope with life-threatening illnesses.

Watch how Sri Lanka has made headway in palliative care with the assistance of international palliative care experts in a documentary '[LIFE ASKED DEATH](#)' which premieres in conjunction with World Hospice and Palliative Care Day on October 8 at www.lifeaskeddeath.com

Stopping the pain in Sri Lanka & Asia

The documentary is a project of the **Lien Collaborative for Palliative Care**, which is a joint initiative of the [Lien Foundation](#)² and the [Asia Pacific Hospice Palliative Care Network](#) (APHN).³ The objective is to build capabilities in palliative care in parts of Asia where such services are sparse or unavailable. LIFE ASKED DEATH is timely, as an estimated 40 million people globally require palliative care yearly, of whom half will need care at the end of life. In Asia alone, annual estimates indicate that 24 million people need palliative care and of these, nearly 11 million will die in pain and distress due to lack of access to pain medicines.

¹ Palliative Care is an approach, a way of delivering services that cares for the patient as a whole person, addressing the physical, emotional and spiritual needs and practical concerns, of both the patient and the family. It aims to improve the quality of life of a patient facing a life-threatening illness and that of his family.

² The Lien Foundation is a philanthropic house in Singapore which works in the areas of water and sanitation, early childhood education as well as ageing and palliative care.

³ The APHN is a charitable non-governmental organisation registered in Singapore in 2001 which supports the development of palliative care in the Asia Pacific region. The charity's mission is to promote access to quality hospice palliative care for all in the Asia Pacific region. APHN members include some 230 organisations that support or provide palliative care and over 1,300 individuals working in the field in the Asia Pacific region.

According to the Global Atlas of Palliative Care, published by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Worldwide Hospice Palliative Care Alliance (WHPCA), Sri Lanka suffers from inadequate access and availability of hospice and palliative care. Its palliative care activities are heavily donor dependent and hence unsustainable. The availability of morphine is also severely limited in Sri Lanka, contrary to WHO's recommendation of oral morphine as the gold standard and essential medication for pain relief that should be available to suffering patients. *See Chart: Morphine Consumption* The scarcity of palliative care and pain relief medicines in Asian countries like Sri Lanka is compounded by other socio-economic issues such as poverty, high patient load and overcrowding at public hospitals and healthcare facilities.

Developing palliative care in Sri Lanka & Asia

Produced by **Moonshine Movies**, LIFE ASKED DEATH highlights the scale of pain and suffering that needs to be urgently addressed in Asia, and offers insights into the positive outcomes that can be achieved even in resource-limited countries. It brings viewers to **Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka** to witness how Lien Collaborative's specialist volunteers bring palliative care and training to these countries. When international experts and local stakeholders work together to develop palliative care capacity in the government-run health systems, the barriers to pain relief and humane care can be removed.

Film Premiere in Colombo, Wijerama House

In conjunction with World Hospice and Palliative Care Day, the film will premiere at special events in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar, attended by invited guests from the countries' healthcare community, government representatives and palliative care advocates.

In Sri Lanka, several film screenings will be held – starting with the Ministry of Health, Nutrition & Indigenous Medicine on 4th October (Tuesday) 2016 at 9am at the Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) in 'Wijerama House', the National Cancer Institute Maharagama on 6th October and the Palliative Care Association of Sri Lanka on 8th October. Complementing the film screening is an online photo exhibition underscoring the urgency for countries to integrate palliative care into their existing healthcare systems and remove barriers to pain relief medications. The exhibition can be viewed online at www.lifeaskeddeath.com

Touching Lives, Relieving Pain, Empowering the Patient

In LIFE ASKED DEATH, viewers are taken on a journey to discover how palliative care relieves the pain affecting millions of sufferers in Asia. In Sri Lanka, the spotlight turns to how good communication by the palliative care team alleviates mental stress and

empowers **38-year old lung cancer patient, Mrs Perera** (not her real name), who has a young son, to plan for the future. With the facts of her condition explained to her, she is able to understand the seriousness of her illness and this knowledge gives her new strength, removing the mental anguish of the unknown.

Co-leader of the Lien Collaborative's Sri Lanka programme and palliative care specialist from Concord Hospital, Australia, Assoc Prof Ghauri Aggarwal, said: "Palliative care helps to improve the quality of life of patients in Sri Lanka. Though some headway has been made under the Lien Collaborative, we need to do more especially in the area of integrating palliative care into the healthcare systems."

She added, "We also need to make changes to our policies to provide the dying with better, greater and easier access to pain relief medications." In July 2016, Sri Lanka's National Steering Committee on Palliative Care, chaired by the Director-General of Health Services, was formed and held its inaugural meeting.

Progress in Sri Lanka under the Vision of "Training of trainers" to expand palliative care outreach

Beginning with Bangladesh and Myanmar in 2013, Sri Lanka in 2014 and, now India, the Lien Collaborative currently involves over 40 international experts, comprising doctors, nurses and social workers who volunteer their time to train some 140 health professionals, who in turn are expected to share this knowledge with their colleagues. In the course of the training, the international teams support local efforts to establish palliative care services in key government-run hospitals and to make oral morphine available to the patients.

In Sri Lanka much progress has been made, including the completion of five modules under the Training-of-trainers programme in February 2016 and a two-day training workshop for nursing leaders from government cancer units in August this year. Major government institutions like the National Cancer Institute Maharagama, where participants of the Lien Collaborative have started a palliative care outpatient service, will become the teaching centres in palliative care in the future.

Policy Changes to make morphine accessible

Through its support of efforts to improve the availability and accessibility of essential pain medications, the Lien Collaborative has seen Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health changing its policy to approve longer prescription of morphine to outpatients from 3 days to one month. (See Annex: Palliative Care in Sri Lanka.)

The Collaborative continues to work closely with Sri Lankan government and health officials, advocating for the need to do away with unfounded fears that often lead hospitals and pharmacies to not stock or make morphine available and accessible.

Collective action needed to remove the barriers to pain relief

The Lien Collaborative believes that collective action from the community, the government, healthcare professionals, patients and their caregivers can remove the obstacles to pain relief. Such barriers include unfounded fears about morphine in patients and family members, fear and ignorance of doctors in prescribing morphine and over-restrictive rules governing the prescribing and dispensing of morphine.

Curtain of hope

The Lien Collaborative has drawn open a curtain of hope to what palliative care can do and how these skills can be acquired. With training and access to pain relief medications, lives can be saved from needless suffering. The documentary concludes: “For millions around the world, death is indeed a painful truth, but there is an alternative which delivers quality of life until our dying breath. This is not a beautiful lie. It is already here for the asking.”

Chart – Morphine Consumption, A Comparison

Annex – Progress in Palliative Care in Sri Lanka

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About the Lien Collaborative

The Lien Collaborative for Palliative Care project is co-developed by the Asia Pacific Hospice Palliative Care Network (APHN) and the Lien Foundation.

This initiative seeks to match the supply of expert resource and knowledge to the demand from developing countries for such skills and know-how so as to build palliative care capabilities in a systematic, impactful and sustainable way. It draws on philanthropy, tertiary educational institutions, palliative care service providers and individuals to collaborate on a project designed to strengthen palliative care capacity and leadership.

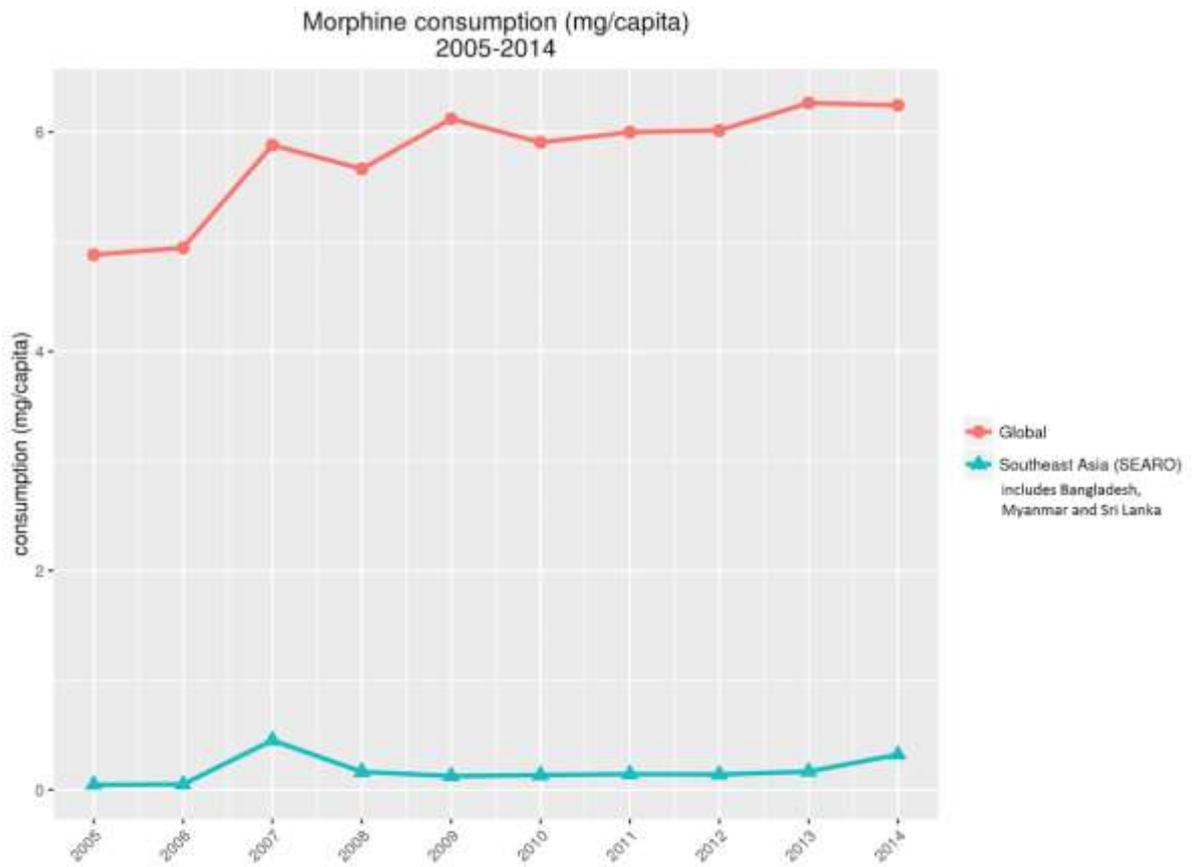
The project aims to help build palliative care capacity in the Asia Pacific region and to integrate this with the mainstream government health system. Its focus is on countries with little or no services.

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Faculty and participants visiting the wards as part of the teaching program at conducted at the National Cancer Institute Maharagama, Sri Lanka

Chart



Sources: International Narcotics Control Board; World Health Organization population data
By: Pain & Policy Studies Group, University of Wisconsin/WHO Collaborating Center, 2016

Annex: Palliative Care in SRI LANKA

Global standing	
Ranking in the world – Quality of Death Index⁴	65th out of 100 countries Did best in Community Engagement category
Global Atlas of Palliative Care at the End of Life⁵	Isolated service provision: Access & availability of hospice and palliative care needs to be improved Palliative care activities need to be less donor dependent in order to be sustainable
Morphine usage <based on 10 year data (2005-2014) ⁶ >	Generally low, annual average consumption of less than 5mg/capita, well below world average Availability of morphine is severely limited ²
Key Challenges	
Palliative care in Sri Lanka is just beginning	Largely charitably funded community services A few unofficial palliative care services at government hospitals and cancer centres No funding for palliative care in government health budget
Education and training needs to be boosted, largely run by charitable organisations	Palliative care not included in undergraduate medical or nursing training Severe lack of social workers & psychologists in health care

⁴ The 2015 Quality of Death Index, Economist Intelligence Unit

⁵ Global Atlas of Palliative Care at the End of Life published jointly by the WHO and the Worldwide Hospice Palliative Care Alliance (WHPCA), January 2014

⁶ International Narcotics Control Board, World Health Organisation by Pain & Policy Group, University of Wisconsin, WHO Collaborating Centre, 2016

Recent Milestones in Palliative Care Development	
Policy	<p>In 2015, outpatient prescriptions for oral morphine increased from 3 days to 30 days at government approved cancer clinics & palliative care & pain clinics</p> <p>In July 2016, National Steering Committee on Palliative Care, chaired by the Director-General of Health Services, was formed & held its inaugural meeting.</p>
Services	New outpatient service started at the National Cancer Institute Maharagama in August 2015
Education	<p>Post-graduate Medical Institute has approved a postgraduate diploma in Palliative Medicine for doctors, to be rolled out in 2017</p> <p>Nursing college discussing curriculum for basic nursing training</p>
About the Lien Collaborative in Sri Lanka - started in 2014	
Number of Lien Collaborative faculty members	16 doctors, nurses and medical social workers from Australia, India, Malaysia and Singapore
Number of Participants	<p>50 Participants from 20 institutions</p> <p>- 17 consultant oncologists, 16 consultant physicians, 4 medical officers, 11 nurses/nurse educators, 1 psychologist, 1 social worker</p> <p>Centralised training at National Cancer Institute Maharagama</p>
Training of Trainers in Palliative Care program	<p>5 in-country training sessions – total 25 training days</p> <p>A two-day training workshop was conducted for nursing leaders from government cancer units in 2016</p>
Overseas Clinical Attachment program	Upcoming