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## The pain of Africa

Palliative care is a hugely neglected segment of Africa's health service delivery. What patients have to endure in many hospitals, health centres, or at home in Africa is just unimaginable in most of Europe where pain control is an essential component of care with full-time staff keeping a watchful eye on the suffering. And yet in this modern day and age, the pain in Africa is entirely unnecessary. There is a substantial pharmacological armoury to choose from, it is just not available.

This issue of *Africa Health* includes a very special report prepared by the African Council on Palliative Care, from its Kampala base. It is intended to stimulate some soul searching, particularly at policy level in many countries, but also amongst health professionals. As Dr Albert Schweitzer wrote in one of his books... 'We must all die, but that I can save him from days of torture, that is what I feel as my great and ever new privilege. Pain is a more terrible lord of mankind than even death himself.'

As the report emphasises, only 4 out of 53 African countries have palliative care integrated into their health or cancer strategic plans. It is also misunderstood, often being confused as being purely a part of hospice care. Can Africa afford to extend services to provide palliative care? It has no option. For the dignity of its people it must. Hopefully APCA's document can be a catalyst for some new initiatives.

The past 2 months have seen significant developments in the vaccine arena.

The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) had a successful funding call with some US\$4.3 billion pledged, which will enable it to expand services to include new vaccines such as against pneumonia and diarrhoeal diseases. And if anyone questions the effectiveness of a good vaccine, you need look no further than the meningitis belt across the Sahel region of Africa stretching from Senegal in the West to Somalia in the East. This year Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have recorded just eight cases between them. A staggering reduction. Usually meningitis A kills thousands of children and young adults from mid-January through to April. The new vaccine – MenAfriVac – costs just US\$0.50 per dose and was developed by a joint venture between WHO and PATH, a not-for-profit organisation based in Seattle. It is being produced by the Indian Serum Institute.

And a poignant note to end on. This issue also reports the loss of Prof Ken Rankin (see page 54) one of our longest-serving contributors. Ken was a great champion of Africa and his contribution to the development of orthopaedic surgery was immense. He will be sadly missed.



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