Federal Ministry of Health and American Cancer Society Launch Pain Free Hospital Initiative

Yearlong Pilot Programs Aim to Improve Access to Essential Pain Medication in Nigeria

ABUJA, NIGERIA (July 16, 2015) – The Federal Ministry of Health and the American Cancer Society today announced the launch of the Pain Free Hospital Initiative (PFHI) Program. PFHI targets large national referral and teaching hospitals to provide simple, accessible pain management training for health care workers. The goal of the initiative is to equip staff to assess pain, provide high-quality first-line treatment and, in doing so, improve overall access to essential pain medication in Nigeria.

To effectively implement pain management into a health care system requires more than just access to medicines – it requires an understanding of when and how to give pain medication and the prioritization of pain management as an essential part of care. Over the course of one year, PFHI will train physicians, nurses, pharmacists and other healthcare providers on how to assess pain levels and dispense pain medication. The program will also stress the importance of pain management for patients, specifically those suffering from pain related to cancer and HIV.

PFHI will be piloted at four hospitals throughout Nigeria: University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital (Ilorin), University College Hospital (Ibadan), University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital (Enugu) and National Hospital Abuja (Abuja). It is envisioned that the one-year pilot project will further refine the design of the project model for effective replication in other federal tertiary health facilities across the country.

In 2012, about 177,000 people were estimated to have died in moderate or severe pain from HIV or cancer in Nigeria. In the same year, the utilization of narcotic medication such as morphine – designated as an “essential medication” by the World Health Organization – was enough to treat only 266 people, representing a mere 0.2-percent coverage of pain treatment needed. In response to this problem, the Federal Ministry of Health began working with the American Cancer Society’s Treat the Pain Program to implement a broad pain management system and imported 19.2kg of pulverized morphine. The roll-out of PFHI is the next step of this collaborative process.

Treat the Pain is an international program within the American Cancer Society to improve access to pain medicines. The program provides technical support to improve patient access to opioid analgesics, with a focus on low and middle-income countries with high unmet need for pain relief. For more information, visit TreatThePain.org.