

Palliative Care and Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis is a curable disease but sadly in South Africa it is a leading cause of death in people who are co-infected with HIV. The member organizations of the Hospice Palliative Care Association (HPCA) provide care and support to large numbers of people living with HIV and are ideally placed to make a significant contribution towards addressing the TB crisis in our country.

In terms of its definition, the goal of palliative care is to improve the quality of life for people with a life threatening illness and their family members. HIV-infected people with TB, particularly drug-resistant TB, clearly fall into this category. A person-centred approach, with a focus on identifying people with potential TB infection through regular screening, providing effective treatment support, infection control, advocating for anti-retroviral treatment (ART) and promoting preventive therapy for HIV positive people who do not have active TB, contributes to managing the infection while making the person feel valued and reducing the stigma associated with both HIV and TB. In addition, compassionate end of life care is provided when TB proves incurable and families are offered bereavement support.

In order to equip its member organizations to meet the challenges associated with TB, HPCA has developed a training course focused on TB in the context of palliative care. Because health care workers are at increased risk of contracting TB, member organizations are encouraged to include TB in their workplace policies. HPCA and its member organizations collaborate with partners in the formal and informal health care sectors so that TB is diagnosed early, appropriate treatment is provided and completed and that people have access to the care they need.