

**IPOS Academy one-day workshop on Communication Skills Training for Healthcare Professionals
involved in Cancer Care held on February 11th 2015**

Organized by
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In collaboration with
Cancer Research and Relief Trust
&
World Health Organization

In India, we have 1.8 million patients with cancer, with more than 1 million new cases per year, and 683,000 deaths per year due to cancer (WHO, 2012). The WHO survey also revealed that India has an oncologists-to-patients ratio of 1:2000 (the US ratio is 1:100). Research emerging from India indicates that we have more than 50% patients who are unaware of their true diagnosis (Chittem et al., 2012). This occurs mainly due to the family-centric care model where the family members, in order to protect the patients' emotional well-being, request nondisclosure and doctors comply with this request. Often, oncologists report not knowing how to break the bad news of a cancer diagnosis, may not know how to approach topics on palliative care or dying and how to integrate family and patients in communication.

Owing to the increasing need for communication skills training for healthcare professionals in cancer care, especially bearing in mind the unique cultural context of India, IIT Hyderabad organized India's *first a one-day workshop focusing solely on communication skills* on February 11th 2015. This interactive workshop included three sessions:

Session 1: **Breaking bad news & discussing prognosis**

Session 2: **Transitioning patients to palliative care & discussing dying**

Session 3: **Running a family meeting**

The renowned and highly experienced faculty that facilitated these sessions were:

Prof Richard Fielding, PhD, Division of Behavioural Sciences, School of Public Health, University of Hong Kong, China

Prof David Kissane, MD, Dept of Psychiatry, School of Clinical Sciences, Monash University, Australia

A/Prof Jayita Deodhar, MD, Dept of Psychiatry & Palliative Care, Tata Memorial Cancer Centre, Mumbai

A/Prof Odette Spryut, MB ChB, Dept of Palliative Care, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Australia

There were 41 participants from diverse disciplines which aided in making the workshop very interactive and dynamic. Participants were oncologists (3), psychiatrists (3), psychologists (6), counselors (1), graduate students in health psychology (8), anthropology (5), public health (8), nursing (1) and sociology (1), and volunteers at NGOs (6). Each session started with approximately 30-45 minutes of explanation of the topic and steps in communication strategies followed by at least 45 minutes of role-playing. Participants were grouped according to their area of work and among them they each had the opportunity to play the patient or the professional. These role-plays were effective and very well-received, with most participants rating these to be the most useful learning tool.

Indeed, we are pleased to note that we received unanimously positive feedback from the participants. Participants agreed strongly that the content (72%), applicability to their work (60%), reading materials (88%), structure (82%), pace (81%) and length (85%) of the workshop was good. Most participants (67%) said they would recommend this workshop to others in their field and 77% of them said they would like to attend a more advanced workshop on the same subject.

Not surprisingly, we were approached by most participants requesting we conduct similar workshops and seminars to be held in the city. Consequently, we are in the process of continuing holding similar academic events and meetings in order to discuss and sensitize patients, caregivers, hospital staff and doctors on various aspects of psychosocial care. Sometimes, it is not possible to hold events such as this communication skills workshop - hence, we will also just have informal coffee meetings to talk work, exchange ideas and simply discuss our perspectives/experiences in cancer care. The overarching ethos is to build a community of like-minded individuals who are committed to improving cancer care in India who regularly meet.

Some suggested topics for future events to be held in Hyderabad (guided by participant feedback) include:

1. Psychosocial interventions in cancer care
2. Communication with difficult patients and families
3. Developing research skills in psycho-oncology
4. Counseling techniques in cancer (especially mindfulness and cognitive behaviour therapy)
5. Pediatric psycho-oncology
6. Survivorship
7. Palliative care
8. Psycho-education