

## IAPCON 2020: Conference Editorial

To assign someone the responsibility of doing something important, thus encouraging that person to contribute or become involved in that task, and in the process making him stronger and more confident about working and productively gain control over the situation – this is the essence of the theme of 27<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Indian Association of Palliative Care, IAPCON 2020: *Entrust, engage and empower!* We aimed to expand the Indian palliative care team by bringing in fresh talent and entrusting them with the noble task of carrying the legacy forward. IAPCON 2020 was organized in the Auditorium Complex of Gauhati Medical College and Hospital, Guwahati, Assam from February 14 to 16, 2020.

*Entrust, engage and empower* relates deeply to the real spirit of palliative care. The need for capacity building, advocacy and service provision has always been a priority in the Indian Palliative Care scenario. This is more so in the North eastern part of India, and IAPCON 2020 was the perfect platform for IAPC to initiate a propulsive action in the Northeast. The conference aimed to disseminate scientific knowledge as well as trigger collective action of the civil society at large to build up networks of service providers including government agencies, NGOs, private players and individuals supporting the cause of Palliative Care.

The road to a successful conference was not easy. On December 4, 2019 the Citizenship Amendment Bill was introduced in the Indian Parliament and widespread protests erupted in Assam subsequently taking a wild face after the bill was passed by the Rajya Sabha. It took a major toll on the conference preparations and at one point of time, it was almost unanimously agreed that the conference cannot be conducted under such circumstance. Internet services in the state was completely shut down for almost three weeks which hampered major communications with delegates and faculty. But every dark cloud has a silver lining. The conditions started to normalize slowly, and in January 2020 major decisions and actions to carry forward the conference were realized. We had a lot to do within the next thirty days.

The Scientific Agenda was designed to include basic yet modern outlook of palliative care pertinent not only to cancer but also non-malignant diseases. We specifically emphasized on topics that were focused on day to day practice; common symptomatology in palliative care like nausea and vomiting, constipation, pain, etc., were presented by young speakers who focused on current evidence and practice guidelines. Non-malignant diseases coupled with integration of palliative care were specifically focused on Renal diseases, Neurological disorders and Geriatric issues. Sessions on complementary therapies like Yoga and Music therapy, sessions for Caregivers and NGOs, a special session on students' contribution to

palliative care advocacy etc., were well received by the multidisciplinary audience. Sessions dedicated to highlight the work being done in Assam and other parts of the northeast by different organizations, both institution-based and NGOs, paved the way forward to come to the national front through IAPCON 2020.

The plenary sessions distinctively focused on Palliative Care and Universal Health Coverage, Integrated palliative care approach, palliative care education and its future prospects. Another highlight of the program was the multidisciplinary discussion on taking palliative care forward in Assam and the North East which drew in important representatives from the Government, National Health Mission, and palliative care experts from India and abroad. The discussion was rich and diverse collating recommendations to build up a strong strategy to take palliative care forward in this part of the country.

Twelve preconference workshops were held in different institutions in twelve different locations of the city. The main objective of choosing different institutions was to propagate the idea of Palliative Care and its essence through workshops. The best part of this was an equal participation of these institutions both in terms of delegate participation and steering the CMEs. Their help and support was logistical as well as functional. Record number of participants were noted with an average of twenty participants in each CME.

Despite many challenges, including a defunct website and the 'nick-of-time decision making', we received more than one hundred and sixty abstracts. Forty-eight abstracts were selected for oral presentations and one-hundred and four for posters. The presenters included doctors, nurses, students, psychologists, paramedics, and volunteers.

We received good feedback from a multidisciplinary audience that was close to 800, a number that exceeded our expectation in view of the recent disturbance in Assam and Northeast. The delegates were a record number from 20 countries and home, a large number from Northeast alone. The scientific committee managed for CME and CNE accreditation of the 3 - day conference from Assam Council of Medical Registration and Assam Nurses', Midwives' and Health Visitors' Council respectively.

It has been a great learning experience for me and my colleagues of IAPCON 2020. On behalf of the Scientific committee, I would like to thank my mentor and guide, Dr. Sushma Bhatnagar for her constant support and encouragement in taking the program forward. I would also like to thank Dr. Mary Ann Muckaden, Dr. Nagesh Simha, Dr. Abhijit Dam, Mr. K.V. Ganpathy, Dr. Biju Raghavan, Dr. Chitra Venkateswaran, Dr. Mhoira Leng and Dr. Savita

Butola for their guidance and support at crucial levels. It would have been impossible without the support of my colleagues Dr. Kalpajit Dutta and Dr. Priyanka Surana who were together with me in this journey. Not to forget the support from the organizing committee led by Dr. Dinesh Goswami under whose leadership this conference has become a reality.

We acknowledge the support of our bright palliative care physicians from All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi led by Dr. Puneet Rathore who were exceptional at managing the conference proceedings in three parallel halls on all three days of the conference. Their contributions and efforts cannot be overemphasized.

My deepest gratitude to Dr. Tapan Saikia, Director of Medical Oncology, Prince Aly Khan Hospital, and (Ex) Board of Directors and Head of Clinical Services in Assam Cancer Care Foundation, for being a constant source of inspiration and confidence for me.

**Sanghamitra Bora**

Department of Palliative Care, Assam Cancer Care Foundation, Guwahati, Assam, India

E-mail: sanghamitrabk@gmail.com; sanghamitra.bora@accf.in

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

Access this article online	
<b>Quick Response Code:</b> 	<b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.jpalliativecare.com">www.jpalliativecare.com</a>
	<b>DOI:</b> 10.4103/0973-1075.285684

**How to cite this article:** Bora S. IAPCON 2020: Conference Editorial. Indian J Palliat Care 2020;26:155-6.