

Can-Helper: India's first toll-free emotional support helpline for cancer patients and their families

A joint initiative by Tata Memorial Centre and Cipla Palliative Care & Training Centre, Pune

11th August 2020, Mumbai: Cancer patients and their families in Mumbai and Pune can now dial in to Can-Helper – a first-of-its-kind toll-free helpline to provide support for fear, anxiety and stress related to cancer. This service, operated by experienced counsellors, is available on a **toll free number 09511948920 on all days of the week from 10 am to 6 pm in English, Hindi and Marathi.**

Whilst cancer impacts the emotional wellbeing of all patients, it is estimated that one out of every three cancer patients require interventions to address their emotional distress- the most common problems being anxiety and depression ¹. These psychosocial problems have become even more acute in Covid due to lack of continuity of care, reduced social support, increased financial burden from loss of jobs etc.

Can-Helper (**Cancer Helpline for Emotional Respite**) is launched by Tata Memorial Centre, Mumbai and Cipla Palliative Care & Training Centre Pune in association with the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) and Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) to address the specific psychosocial needs of cancer patients and their caregivers, especially those in advanced stage of the disease.

Talking about the service, **Dr. Badwe, Director**, Tata Memorial Centre said, "The Covid - 19 pandemic has had a disastrous impact on all patients and especially those with serious chronic illnesses including advanced cancer. With this helpline, we hope to address psychosocial counselling needs to reduce the stress and anxiety of the patients and their family members. We will also include patient navigators in this endeavor to retain the continuum of care"

Psychosocial support has been identified as vital in decreasing the levels of stress, anxiety and depression in cancer patients ².

Speaking about this initiative, **Rumana Hamied**, Trustee, Cipla Palliative Care & Training Centre said, "We realised the need for such a service when our home care team spoke to patients and families during Covid who told us about their fears of treatment being delayed, worries related to their family members due to lack of nursing care support and a growing sense of isolation and helplessness. We hope that callers to the helpline will be better equipped with resources, strategies and confidence to cope in these uncertain times".

References

Cancer patients are facing serious challenges and experiencing anxiety, fear,, loneliness, and helplessness.

1. Garutti M, Cortiula F, Puglisi F. Seven Shades of Black Thoughts: COVID-19 and Its Psychological Consequences on Cancer Patients . *Front Oncol* . 2020;10:1357. <https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fonc.2020.01357>.

It is estimated that the prevalence of emotional distress of patients with cancer range from 41.7% to 46%. The most common disorders were anxiety and depression.

2. Alexander A, Sreenath K, Murthy R S. Beyond numbers – Recent understanding of emotional needs of persons diagnosed with cancer 2007–2018. *Indian J Palliative Care* [serial online] 2020 [cited 2020 Jul 27]; 26:120-8. Available from: <http://www.jpalliativecare.com/text.asp?2020/26/1/120/276877>

About Cipla Palliative Care & Training Centre

Established in 1997 as part of Cipla's endeavor to provide humanitarian compassionate care to cancer patients and their care givers, Cipla Palliative Care & Training Centre, Pune is a world class 55-bedded facility that provides free-of-cost holistic palliative care to advanced cancer patients and their families through in-patient admissions, homecare and OPD services in Pune City.

The center works on a unique family care model – where the family member stays at the center with the patient and is cared for equally. Family members are also trained in caregiving skills. A professional multi-disciplinary team of doctors, nurses, pain specialists, physiotherapist, nutritionist and volunteers provide physical and psycho-social pain relief to patients and their loved ones, in the most difficult times of their life.

Till date over 17,500 patients have been cared for, free-of-cost.

For more, please visit www.ciplapalliativecare.org or you can view a short 3 min film on the Centre [here](#)

About Tata Memorial Centre

Tata Memorial Centre is one of the oldest premier cancer centers in the world, with over 75 years of excellence in patient care, high impact education and training programmes and innovative cancer research. TMC is at the forefront of local, national and international cancer management efforts. Patient management comprises of various disease management groups along with prevention and screening, palliative and psychosocial care. An emphasis on team approach provides patients with evidence-based, yet individualized care plans, addressing the cancer treatment protocols as well as emotional and social needs of the patients and the caregivers, on the overarching principle of empathy. The work at TMC is under the aegis of Department of Atomic Energy, Government of India who has supported strongly and paved the way forward for excellence in cancer care in the country.

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