

# Psychooncological care in the Czech Republic with special focus on working-age patients



**Amelie, civic association, is a non-profit organization established in 2006. Supports both professional and lay psychosocial and psychooncological care for oncological patients and their families and friends, and draws professional and general public's attention to these issues.**

**Amelie unveils a brand new view of comprehensive psychosocial support and its potential in the Czech Republic. In all phases of treatment and recovery, Amelie sets up links between care rendered by professionals and self-help groups, motivation workshops and training programs focusing on primary and secondary prevention.**

## Amelie's Code:

- There is no difference in position between the donor and the beneficiary. Either as a professional or a volunteer, I work with the association mainly for my own satisfaction.
- I respect the convictions (faith, creed), decisions, and freedom of choice of everyone who visits the programs of Amelie o.s.
- I offer my own experience or professional knowledge, but I do not give preference to any treatment methods or approaches, drugs and the like. Within the activities of Amelie o.s. there is no place for commercial activities by individuals or companies.
- I collaborate and seek common ground with Amelie o.s. and its partners, as well as with other entities, persons and organizations that deal with the same issues.

The project of psychosocial assistance and psycho-oncology treatment was developed by Pavla Tichá, who as soon as the first phase of her breast cancer treatment was completed began helping out as a volunteer at an inpatient oncology unit.

Experienced in volunteering in an inpatient oncology unit and skilled in communication and PR management, she designed a project that won support of Henrieta Tondlová MD, one of the first psychiatrists who started to work with oncological patients and their families and friends 28 years ago, and Miachaela Chrdlová MD who follows up doctor Tondová's work.

Amelie's activities are based, inter alia, on conclusions of "Psychiatric and psychosocial issues faced by patients suffering from malignant tumors", a project implemented in 1985-1990.

We cooperate with the Integrated Oncology Centers, First Faculty of Medicine, General University Hospital, Prague, Olomouc University Hospital and other medical facilities.

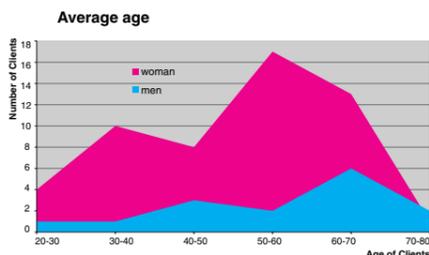
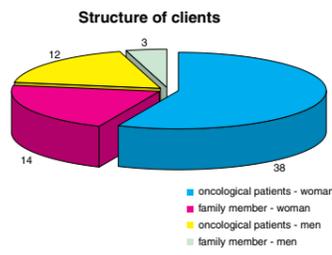
In mid 2008, the transfer to professional organizations started to be continued also in 2009. We decided to do so due to grants awarded by CEE Trust and BMS Foundation, distinguished international foundations, and also based on support received from governmental authorities, ministries and municipalities and donations from corporate and private donors.

*"Thank you for the early help you gave me when I learnt my husband's diagnosis. Leaving you I was full of hope and I knew that I was not alone with this problem and that it was worth fighting. Thank you for your great help in the times of bad news, I am so glad I have Internet at home and grateful I found you there."*

From a client's letter

Requiring proficient experts and imposing significant financial burden, advanced treatment of oncological patients is centralized in bigger Czech cities. What is missing even there are interdisciplinary links between physicians and non-medical workers of various specializations who contribute to care provided to oncological patients. Psychotherapeutic intervention, social and spiritual help or support psychosocial programs should become integral parts of comprehensive psychooncological care for patients and their families and friends provided across all phases of the illness. The existing system of health insurance does not allow patients to choose psychooncological care that would match their real needs. A change is usually sought by patients themselves, but more and more often also by experts who are aware of the necessity to make the treatment more comprehensive.

**Amelie Outpatient Units** (Ambulance Amelie, a trademark of professional psychooncological assistance) are psychiatric or psychological outpatient units providing oncological patients and their relatives and friends with both individual or family therapy and, wherever necessary, psychiatric treatment with medication. The goal is to have enough professional medical facilities prepared to render psychooncological care covered by health insurance programs of most health insurance companies. These methods of care for oncological patients and their relatives and friends have not become standard in the Czech system of covered care, yet.



*"When treating a tumor, nearly all attention must be concentrated on eradicating the illness. If we succeed still an empty space remains in the patient's soul... the best thing to do is to find a positive aspect about the illness: this time to start living a real life. And thus Amelie was established. Even us, doctors, have been aware of this for quite a while and that is why we are so glad to have Amelie."*

Doc. MUDr. Petra Tesařová, Oncological clinic of the First Faculty of Medicine, General University Hospital, Prague 2

**Amelie Volunteers** – trained volunteers, both former patients and people with no oncological experience, work in Amelie Centers at inpatient wards of oncology clinics. Volunteer trainings started in 2008. We seek to make volunteer activities an integral part of care for oncological patients under various levels of stress. Special care must be given to former patients who register for our program.

*...I received information that opened the door to my volunteering in the oncology ward, I understood that it would be tough work, but I did not feel discouraged... what I liked was the community and personal approach... my visit in the hospital lead me to a new perception of reality...*

From a survey among candidates for Amelie volunteers

## Other goals for the future:

- To increase awareness of the public, oncologists and other specialists of the importance of interconnecting psychotherapeutic, support, spiritual and social care for patients and their relatives and friends
- To establish a safety net including these services in the Czech Republic
- To develop a methodology enabling both medical and non-medical facilities to work with oncological and other long-stay patients, to provide them with psychotherapy and support assistance eligible for coverage within the health insurance system
- To find ways how to bring patients back to life and work, including support helping them get adjusted to new conditions

**Amelie Center and Office**  
**Na Truhlářce 39, 180 00 Prague 8**  
**Phone: +420 739 004 222**  
**E-mail: amelie@amelie-os.cz**  
**www.amelie-os.cz**



**Amelie Centers** (daily centers) – to oncological patients and their relatives and friends Amelie Centers offer individual and group therapeutic sessions lead by psychologists and therapist, including art therapists and drama therapists, relaxation and education programs lead by experienced trainers (music workshops, yoga, tai-chi, healthy cooking and other courses). Amelie Centers link professional care with self-help groups.

**Long Week-Ends** with psychotherapeutic and physiotherapeutic program for patients (also during outpatient treatment) and their relatives and friends

**Info Line and on-line Help Line** – crisis intervention, social, legal, psychological and oncological advisory.

*"February 2003 – I had my first epileptic fit. I underwent biopsy... diagnosed with fibrillary astrocytoma... surgery... November 2007 – my second surgery and then radiation treatment. I am completely down, totally depressed, unable to do anything else but weep... Lucky me, Amelie came in my way. I want to thank you, Amelie, for all I am now... Fall 2008 – I start discontinue antidepressant drugs, cut doses of antiepileptics and start part time work. And most of all I enjoy each day and live it up!"*

From web portal www.osudy.cz, Lenka, aged 28