



Providing high quality care for older adults with cancer: a pressing need for developing countries

Brindar atención de alta calidad a los adultos mayores con cáncer: una necesidad apremiante para los países en desarrollo

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In this issue of the Mexican Journal of Oncology, we have included a unique manuscript by Dr. Torres and colleagues dealing with the specific issues around the management of oncological emergencies in older adults with cancer. Although a large proportion of our patients are older adults, most oncologists receive very little or no training in the use of geriatric principles as a part of cancer care, despite it being recommended by both the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) and the European Society of Medical Oncology (ESMO) as part of their joint curriculum¹. Therefore, publishing studies like this, which bring to the forefront areas of oncology which are often overlooked, represents a valuable resource for our readers.

Virtually every region and country in the world is experiencing the challenges of providing medical care for an aging population. Although the most developed countries still have the highest proportion of older people, the absolute number of older adults is higher in developing regions. Globally, more than 60% of all 65-year-olds now live in low- and middle-income countries like Mexico, and the number of older people is expected to grow the fastest in developing regions like Latin America (71% increase) over the next 15 years^{2,3}. This increase in the number of older persons will have a profound impact on all sectors of society, including cancer care, and preparing for these changes is critical in order to achieve the well-being of our entire

population. Since noncommunicable diseases such as cancer are strongly associated with aging, the number of new cancer cases in our country, and their complexity, is expected to increase in parallel with the aging of the population.

Although population aging and the associated increase in non-communicable diseases represent a global challenge, the preparation of health care systems and service providers to face these changes is highly variable. In many regions of the world, older adults already account for the majority of cancer cases and deaths, and this will undoubtedly increase in the coming years.² Unfortunately, health care systems in countries like Mexico are designed primarily to address acute illnesses, and many are insufficiently prepared to provide medical care to older adults with complex chronic conditions that need multidisciplinary care with a geriatric focus. Therefore, there is an urgent need to expand, improve and strengthen the resources and initiatives aimed at providing care to older adult patients with cancer, including generating research and educational initiatives in Mexico and the rest of Latin America, and providing knowledge about geriatric principles to every oncologist.

Health care systems in developing countries must therefore shift their focus to providing high-quality care for older cancer patients across the spectrum of disease. Regional and global efforts are needed to

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Date of reception: 20-01-2023

Date of acceptance: 23-01-2023

DOI: 10.24875/j.gamo.M23000237

Available online: 13-02-2023

Gac Mex Oncol. 2023;22(1):1-2

www.gamo-smeo.com

increase the geriatric competency of the workforce, to design effective health promotion and disease prevention programs for older adults, and to implement interdisciplinary clinical initiatives aimed at reducing inequities in cancer care. Organizations like SMeO, through the publication of papers such as the one by Torres et al in this issue of the journal, through the development of research studies, and through the inclusion of geriatric oncology in the annual meeting and in other educational programs, are leading the way in Latin America. These local initiatives will certainly play a role in the much-needed implementation of geriatric

oncology in our region and in other regions of the developing world, and lead to an improvement in the way we provide care for all older persons with cancer.

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