

Awareness, perception and practices of cancer-related malnutrition among junior doctors
Empowering junior medical oncology clinicians on cancer-related malnutrition

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Description of the initiative

Background / context

Cachexia and sarcopenia are common in patients with cancer, due to both the disease itself and applied treatments. Although these conditions are responsible for poor outcomes, there is still little sensitivity in the medical oncology class to recognize and adequately treat them.

Rationale for the initiative

Starting from the concept that a proper knowledge of pathophysiology and clinical relevance of cachexia and sarcopenia are indispensable for their proper recognition and therapy, we aim to define the level of awareness of these issues among junior clinical oncologists.

Objectives and scope

The present project aims to evaluate, on the part of junior medical oncologists, awareness regarding the frequency of malnutrition, sarcopenia and cachexia in oncologic patients and their role in influencing both patient outcome and potential therapeutical approaches, using a questionnaire with pre-defined multiple answers.

Planned activities & deliverables

• Outline the steps to be taken

The action plan includes the following steps:

- 1) a survey conducted among the junior oncologists to evaluate their attitude and knowledge of the role of malnutrition and nutrition support in cancer patients
- 2) depending on the level of knowledge of the respondents, we plan to organize semestral/annual theoretical and practical clinical nutrition courses for junior oncologists

• What are the concrete deliverables of the project?

A full report of the analyses of 40 questions, including the percentage of correct answers of the respondents according to different topics, ranging from general to ones that are more specific

What achievements are possible in the next 12 and 24 months? Next 12 months: data collection and analysis.

12-24 months: organization of 2 basic and 2 advanced clinical nutrition courses; final exam and attendance certificate.

Resources & enablers

- **Describe personnel, financial needs** A team of experts for clinical nutrition courses is available from the SINPE network. A cost of 15,000 euros has been estimated to organize the courses. To analyse the survey results, online questionnaire software, data analysis and project manager 12,000 euros will be needed. Publications costs are estimated 3,000 euros. Therefore 30,000 euros are requested for the duration of the project.
- **Specify how the grant will be spent** The grant will be spent in the organization of **periodic** basic and advanced clinical nutrition courses with theoretical and practical sessions to improve the skills of junior oncologists in the clinical nutrition management of patients with cancer.
- **What factors will make it successful?** The involvement of Italian Oncology Postgraduate School Directors and junior oncologists' cooperation.

Results/outcomes & expected impact

- **How will the findings be implemented?** The results will be used as a basis to potentially broaden and apply this innovative education project to other clinical specialties in Italy.
- **How will this project advance patient care / contribute to optimal nutritional care?** The project aims to sensitize oncologists in an early identification of those at risk of malnutrition or malnourished and to address them to the right nutritional treatment for an adequate therapy. It is well known and clearly demonstrated that an appropriate nutritional status improves tolerability to oncologic treatments.
- **What makes the project innovative?**
- A precise estimate of the educational formation level of medical oncologists, with reference to cachexia and sarcopenia issues and their potential therapy is lacking in Italy. The knowledge of such data may represent the basis for an improvement at an educational level.
- **Will the project be likely to influence national nutrition policy?** We plan to disseminate our final findings to the Italian Schools of Oncology as well as to the official Societies of Oncology and Clinical Nutrition in order to sensitize and aware them of the need of better and tailored educational initiatives.
- **Is the project transferable to other settings / countries?**
- This approach could be adopted in other medical areas where there is the evidence of a gap between the educational formation provided by the Postgraduate schools and the current practice/research in the field of nutrition, regardless of their occurrence in Italy or in other European countries.