

ESMO Palliative Care Fellowship (04 August 2024 – 30 August 2024)

Oğur Karhan

FINAL REPORT

Home Institute: Harran University, Türkiye

Host Institute: King Hussein Cancer Center, Jordan

Mentor: Omer Shamieh

Introduction

Incidence of cancer are steadily increasing, therefore more patients will be diagnosed, treated and eventually, during the treatment or after it, will need palliative care. As a medical oncologist my main interest is in the treatment of cancer. My main purpose is to follow new developments and apply novelties in my daily practice. However, patients deserve to be assessed as a whole, including but not limited to the symptomatic, spiritual, psychosocial and cultural aspects of their care.

In my daily practice, I felt that I needed to improve my palliative care approaches, not only for the improvement of pain management, but crucially the development of my spiritual, social and psychological approach to patients and their families. Patients and their families have a desire and the right to be part of the treatment process. As the treatment of cancer improves thanks to new drugs such as immunotherapy and drug conjugates, I feel that a holistic approach to the care of patients will improve the efficiency of treatment as much as chemotherapy.

To further develop my skills and knowledge in palliative care and my approaches to comprehensive cancer care, I applied for the ESMO Palliative Care Fellowship. I was successfully awarded the fellowship, being fortunate to spend a one-month observership at the King Hussein Cancer Centre in Jordan.

Goals or aims

- To improve pain management.
- Observe the management and treatment of patients.
- To improve my skills in psychosocial, spiritual and cultural aspects of palliative care.
- To gain competence in ethical issues and communication skills in end-of-life care.

Description of the time spent at host institute

- Week 1: Introduction to palliative care principles and patient assessment.
- Week 2: Pain management and symptom control.
- Week 3: Psychosocial, spiritual and cultural aspects of palliative care.
- Week 4: Ethical issues and communication skills in end-of-life care.

In summary, for the first two weeks I went on rounds for the in-patient services. While there, I had the chance to observe the care of patients at the end-of-life, especially the preparation of the family for death and the organisation of the patients' treatment, which was impressive. The approaches to comfort measures and dealing with patients passing away in a peaceful way was very instructive for me. In addition, I observed minimising treatment, avoiding over-treatment and follow-up, which can harm patients near the end-of-life. All decisions were made in collaboration with the patient and their family. Although the local people speak Arabic, the medical notes were in English, which helped me a lot. During these inpatient visits, I observed communication skills, particularly active listening with the patients and their families. All patients and families had enough time to express their feelings, complaints and problems.

In the last two weeks, I was mainly based within the out-patient setting. It was during this time that I had the opportunity to observe pain management, both the optimisation of pain management and the weaning off opioids. I also observed how to treat insomnia and how to approach patients, including spiritual and psychosocial aspects. I had a great opportunity to visit the medical oncology department and have conversations with my colleagues there.

Conclusion

This wonderful fellowship gave me the opportunity to improve my knowledge in the field of palliative care. The skills I gained during the fellowship will help me in my daily practice, especially in pain management, psychosocial, spiritual approaches and also end-of-life care. I had the opportunity to observe a patient care system which is different from my own. I am going to try to implement what I have learnt to improve palliative care in the oncology department of my institute.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank ESMO for giving me this fellowship opportunity.

I would like to sincerely thank the Palliative Care Department of the King Hussein Cancer Centre, giving special thanks to my mentor Dr Omar Shamieh.

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