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A Manifesto on Improving Cancer Care in Conflict-Impacted Populations

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The first-ever Global Summit on War and Cancer took place from December 14 to 16, 2023, organized by the Institute of Cancer and Crisis and OncoDaily. This important event brought together people and organizations committed to fighting cancer in areas affected by conflict and advocating for better healthcare policies. The summit featured renowned speakers, from healthcare professionals, policymakers, through to patient advocates, who discussed the urgent challenges faced by cancer patients in conflict-affected regions including Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Syria, Mexico, and more. Around 50 countries were represented, with hundreds of participants attending the on-line summit. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) and Her Royal Highness Princess Dina Mired of Jordan, the Honorary President of the European Organization for Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC) and the Patron of the International Society of Paediatric Oncology (SIOP), gave the opening speeches.
The Manifesto on Improving Cancer Care in Conflict-Impacted Populations presents a course of action to address the ramifications of armed conflict on cancer care, control and prevention across the many different ecosystems of insecurity. This manifesto emphasizes the urgent need for international collaboration to develop and deliver context-specific cancer care services in acute humanitarian emergencies and protracted conflict settings, as well as supporting the implementation of pragmatic research to improve the understanding of patient needs and provide guidance for the design of specific care models. The manifesto recognises that improving cancer care in conflict requires strengthening the health systems of conflict-affected countries, promoting knowledge exchange and prioritizing research, empowering multilevel cooperation between stakeholders, as well as mobilizing resources in the face of many competing demands. Conflict and complex emergencies impact cancer patients in different ways and this Manifesto recognises that context-specific solutions will be required across different settings. The Manifesto on Improving Cancer Care in Conflict-Impacted Populations sets out key recommendations for enhancing cancer care in conflict-affected regions.

Key Recommendations

- To advocate unequivocally that the rules of the Geneva Convention with regards to safeguarding health during conflicts must be implemented first as a foundational element. This is the essential precondition for the execution of any humanitarian health effort, and consequently, for the implementation of specific care programs for cancer patients.
- The WHO needs to create a standing official working group with key stakeholders including medical experts in the field of oncology, representatives of non-governmental organizations with expertise in humanitarian crises response and global-health researchers to address cancer care challenges in conflict-affected populations and develop specific guidelines and protocols. Advocate for inclusive strategies and care models for cancer patients in humanitarian settings, addressing the complexity of cancer entities, the specific requirements for palliative care and the distinct needs of different age groups, such as pediatric patients with cancer and blood disorders.
- In cooperation with the main stakeholders, publish an annual report on the state of cancer care in conflict-affected regions, including progress updates and recommendations.
Prioritize investment in cancer care services, including rebuilding cancer care infrastructure, as well as provide training programs for healthcare professionals dealing with the consequences of conflict.

Exemplars such as the Ireland – Northern Ireland – US National Cancer Institute Consortium emphasise how international collaboration can empower delivery of the health dividend of peace. The importance of addressing cancer in humanitarian settings has now been recognized by the WHO at the recent Global High-Level Technical meeting held in Copenhagen on February 27-29, 2024. Although there is still much work to be done, there is now political willingness and engagement from the wider community to serve this critically underserved cancer population.

We declare no competing interests.

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