



Fight of Turkish medical oncologists against cancer: Focus on two societies: Turkish Society of Medical Oncology and Turkish Oncology Group

Huseyin Abali ^{a, *}, Ahmet Demirkazik ^b

^a Acibadem University School of Medicine, Department of Internal Medicine, Medical Oncology Unit, Istanbul, Turkey

^b Ankara University School of Medicine, Department of Internal Medicine, Medical Oncology Unit, Ankara, Turkey

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Turkey is a bridge where Europe and Asia meet at narrow neck of sea, the Bosphorus, with its cosmopolitan population of 80 million and 16th biggest economy in the world. The country has to fight with many problems occurring as a result of its location, middle east, one the most unstable regions in the world. Now, it is trying to take care of 3.5 million Syrians and Iraqis who escaped the war. Our fight against cancer has started with radiation therapy more than 100 years ago, just after the advent of radiation. Being a rather young clinical science, medical oncology has been started in 1970's by few pioneers in the world. Society of Medical Oncology was established in 1997. Being the national umbrella society, now TSMO have 575 members.

In 1973, the first National Cancer Congresses (NCC) was held predominantly by medical oncologists. Held every other year, the last NCC, being the 21st, was in 2015. Now we are eagerly awaiting the 22nd. Traditionally after every congress, oncologists gather and decide on the next one's location, budget, etc. In 2003 just after 15th NCC in 2003, it was decided after a long debate that subsequent congresses will be held jointly by Medical Oncology, Radiation Oncology and Pediatric Oncology Associations. The NCC's had been organized every two years, it was agreed upon that these three societies would organize their own congresses in the year in between. It was the year 2006 that the first medical oncology congress was held by the Society of Medical Oncology and the Society's web page was launched. The year 2006 witnessed the 31st ESMO conference was successfully hosted by the Turkish Society of Medical Oncology in Istanbul.

* Corresponding author. Acibadem Adana Hastanesi Tıbbi Onkoloji Bölümü, Cumhuriyet Cad No 66, Seyhan, Adana, Turkey. Fax: +903224554474.

E-mail address: dr.huseyinabali@yahoo.com (H. Abali).

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The Ministry of Health decided to train more internal medicine specialist to meet the need for medical oncologists, which was insufficient to care for growing cancer burden. Particularly Ministry of Health Training Hospitals rather than more established university hospitals started to recruit a large number of medical oncology subspecialty assistants. This resulted in a heterogeneity in subspecialty training in quality in the country, since those hospitals have fewer number of experienced faculties compared to university hospitals. To ease the heterogeneity, TSMO prepared a nation-wide intensive training program in line with the ASCO-ESMO curriculum. Subspecialty assistants and specialists were supposed to meet 5–6 times a year in Ankara, Istanbul, or another city for on weekend. It was planned that curriculum would be finished in 2–3 period. Feedbacks on the courses have been always positive. After the completion of ASCO-ESMO curriculum in three years, TSMO executive board decided to continue the program. Subspecialty assistants and specialists attended the course not only freshened their knowledge in oncology but had an opportunity to meet each other, as well.

ESMO established a young oncologists group, TSMO supported young oncologists, the future of cancer fighter, in every aspect. As a result of good relationships, Turkey had a member in ESMO Young Oncologist Committee. International Relations Commissions was established by Turkish Society of Medical Oncology in order to further improve international relations. The commission pioneered the establishment of the specialty of medical oncology, which was not in the UEMS (Union of European Medical Specialties), by explaining it to the ESMO representative and ESMO executive board. The first head of medical oncology specialty in UEMS is Turkish. Young oncologists group at TSMO translated some parts of the handbooks prepared by ESMO for public use and published the Turkish version on the ESMO web page in 2014 and 2015. Keeping close contact with the Ministry of Health, TSMO enabled medical oncology specialists to work in multi-disciplinary hospitals in Turkey.

TSMO is trying to collaborate with the respective societies by holding regional meetings and trying to launch clinical researches. As a result, the Onco-bridge meeting was started in Istanbul in 2015 to gather oncologists from neighboring countries. The society have been organizing Best of ASCO meetings, where the best studies

overviewed after the ASCO (American Society of Clinical Oncology) Annual Meeting. TSMO's long term goal is to make it a regional international meeting by inviting international speakers and attendees. Having close historical ties, TSMO gathers annually with oncologists in Azerbaijan, a Turkish country in Caucasia.

To be known better internationally and develop international ties, the society began to have a TSMO Booth every year at ASCO and ESMO (European Society of Medical Oncology) Meetings.

TSMO has an award and support program which include international scholarship for young oncologists who want to visit major cancer centers in USA and Europe, participation of young oncologists in international congresses, a budget for support scientific projects submitted by its members, and annual research award.

Lastly, TSMO decided to publish an international oncology journal, "Journal of Oncological Sciences (JOS)" and agreed with Elsevier in 2015. Its front cover was designed by a patient with testicular cancer. It will be published three times a year. Its first 3 issues have already been published. A shorter version of this paper was published a front matter in the first issue.

Another important step forward in fight against cancer in Turkey is the establishment of Turkish Oncology Research Group (TOG) in 1989 and started prospective multicenter clinical trials in the same year. TOG consisted of some oncology centers in Ankara and İstanbul at the beginning. It started to organize new multicenter and multidisciplinary trials in 1990's, with enrollment of new medical oncology and radiation oncology centers. As a result of addition of newer centers, TOG reached 155 members in 35 centers and had 13 subgroups like lung cancer, gastrointestinal cancer, etc. TOG had completed 16 projects at 12th year of foundation in 2012.

TOG entitled an official status and was named as Turkish Oncology Research Group Association in 2004 and arranged its first workshop in the same year. Thereafter, TOG organized annually "TOG workshops". Five more subgroups were added in the next 12 years. This year, TOG organized the 12th workshops with 18 subgroups. It published original articles in international indexed journals with an increasing representation since 2011. It published 2–3 articles in 2011–2013,^{1–7} 5 articles in each 2014^{8–13} and 2015^{14–18} and reached 8 articles in 2016.^{18–25} Young oncologists' group is the most active one among the subgroups. TOG organized the 12th workshops in October 28–30, 2016. It continues the multicenter trials with medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, pathologists, basic oncology scientists, and many kind of oncologic surgeons.

Fight against cancer in Turkey began 40 years ago, with a great improvement in time. Foundation of 2 societies, TSMO and TOG, accelerated the development at multiple dimensions. Oncology Community in Turkey aims beyond national borders by developing close ties with neighboring countries. Of course, there are a lot to do, fight has just started.

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