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WHO events

[1]This summary is extracted from the report on the Regional consultation meeting on the Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer, virtual meeting, 25–26 January, 2021 (https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/WHOEMNCD148E-eng.pdf?ua=1).

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Introduction

Cancer is a leading cause of death for children, with almost 400 000 new cases diagnosed globally (1) and 33 800 new cases estimated among children aged 0–14 years in the Eastern Mediterranean Region in 2020 (1). Although childhood cancer is curable for the majority of children when essential diagnostic, therapeutic and supportive care services are accessible, profound inequalities in access and outcomes exist within and between countries, leading to as few as 20–30% of children living in low- and middle-income countries surviving (2).

In September 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the launch of the WHO Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer (GICC) (3) following a series of meetings after the recognition by Member States, WHO and partners of the need to increase the prioritization of childhood cancer in order to transform health systems and reduce mortality related to noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). Through this initiative, WHO will support governments in assessing current capacities in cancer diagnosis and treatment, and in integrating childhood cancer into national strategies, health benefits packages and social insurance schemes. The

goal of the initiative is to reach a global survival rate of at least 60% by 2030 (3), while reducing suffering and improving the quality of life for children by increasing the prioritization of childhood cancer nationally, regionally and globally; and expanding the capacity of countries to provide quality childhood cancer care.

To discuss an appropriate regional governance structure for the initiative and identify suitable modes of regional collaboration for the successful implementation of the GICC in the Region, a regional consultation meeting was held virtually during 25-26 January 2021 (4). The meeting was attended by over 100 participants, including representatives from 19 ministries of health from the Region, paediatric oncologists, and representatives of global and regional paediatric oncology associations, UN agencies, and other global, regional and national partners in childhood cancer care, as well as the three levels of WHO.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

provide Member States with updated information on the GICC and the CureAll technical package (5);

assess the regional childhood cancer situation based on regional modelling estimates and rapid overviews of national capacity and childhood cancer programmes in the Region;

identify and agree on a possible regional governance structure and partnership model to support the roll out of the GICC in the Region; and

discuss and agree on a stepwise approach to roll out the GICC in the Region.

Summary of discussion

The GICC and CureAll technical package present an opportunity for governments to better plan and integrate childhood cancer programmes at a national level. Strong political commitment will be necessary for the success and sustainability of the initiative. Furthermore, the Eastern Mediterranean Region is frequently affected by emergencies, making it crucial to find a means of not only strengthening health systems in normal situations, but maintaining access to

services under emergency situations. Building and delivering high-quality care for children with cancer requires multi-agency support and strong multidisciplinary services. There is a multitude of partners already active in the Region that can support the GICC, necessitating a regional governance structure to foster collaboration between partners, under the leadership of WHO.

Recommendations

To WHO

Implementing regional stakeholder mapping to determine potential engagement and scope of activities;

holding virtual consultations on a regional governance structure and partnership model for the GICC;

implementing a situation analysis of the status of childhood cancer in the Region using adapted CureAll assessment tools; and

developing and disseminating a Call for Proposals for projects that address barriers to childhood cancer care,

To Member States

Supporting the development/scaling up of national childhood cancer programmes; and

implementing CureAll campaigns.

References

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