



## **ESMO Palliative Care Fellowship (January 2024 – March 2024)**

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### **FINAL REPORT**

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Home Insist Ute: Monash Medical Centre, Monash Health, Melbourne, Australia

Mentor: Peter Poon

#### **Introduction**

Palliative care improves the quality of life of patients and that of their families who are facing challenges associated with life-threatening illness, especially cancer. It involves a variety of services delivered by a range of professionals that all have equally important roles to play, including physicians, nurses, support workers, paramedics, pharmacists and physiotherapists to support patients and their families.

As an oncology physician, I realised the importance of palliative care in 2011 when my department was preparing to set up the “Good Pain Management” ward in P.R. China. From then on, I discovered how important quality of life is for cancer patients, and started to do some basic work in this field, including setting up a system for comprehensive assessment, dynamic assessment and follow-up assessment of pain for cancer patients, building a database for the assessment and treatment of pain for cancer patients, screening for predictive factors of chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting in the Chinese population, as well as providing basic psychosocial support for cancer patients and their relatives. In addition, I have been undertaking clinical studies in the field of palliative care. However, palliative care in P.R. China is still in its initial development stage, facing problems of the transformation of social ideology and the lack of relevant institutions and personnel. Due to the increasing incidence of cancer in China, more needs to be done to help cancer patients and their families to accept and navigate palliative care, to introduce universal education around palliative care ethics and to improve the service delivery.

Having achieved several goals in my career in medical oncology, especially in palliative medicine delivering cancer care, I believed that there would be a good fit between my work experience and the aim of the ESMO Palliative Care fellowship. I was successfully awarded this fellowship in 2019, but due to the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic my commencement was delayed, but fortunately, with the help and effort of Prof Peter Poon, I finally completed my fellowship in 2024.

## **Goals or aims**

To study and observe the palliative care service provided to cancer patients in an ESMO accredited Designated Centre to gain additional experience in palliative care.

To take part in clinical research as part of a palliative care research group.

To bring my skills gained in palliative care back to my home institute to improve our palliative care service.

## **Description of the time spent at host institute**

The host institute I visited was the Supportive and Palliative Care Unit at the Monash Medical Centre, Monash Health, in Australia, which is an excellent ESMO accredited Designated Centre delivering integrated palliative care. It is located in McCulloch House, a historic but comfortable building surrounded by beautiful gardens, where patients can spend their time in the sunshine. The palliative care team at Monash Health is comprehensive featuring a number of professionals including doctors, nurses, a consultation service, allied health practitioners such as social workers, spiritual care, a music therapist, occupational and physio therapists, pharmacists, research assistants, a community programme coordinator and volunteer manager, as well as fellows and administrators.

My fellowship at Monash Health included the following two parts:

### Clinical observation

McCulloch House has sixteen inpatient beds at Monash Medical Centre, it provides comfort care for people living with an incurable illness. On this ward, I spent some of my time taking part in the morning hand over, ward rounds, and multi-disciplinary (MDT) meetings every Monday afternoon. Whilst on the ward of the palliative care unit, I also had the opportunity to observe music therapy, and meet with nurses and social workers to get to know more regarding their roles in palliative care. In addition, the palliative care team also has an outpatient's service for patients outside of the hospital. I was able to observe their Rapid Palliative Care service and Virtual Palliative Care Clinic during my placement. The Rapid Palliative Care service supports patients who have been discharged from the Monash Health inpatient units who are awaiting community palliative care. The Virtual Palliative Care Clinic provides a convenient way for discharged patients to meet the palliative care doctors remotely at home every several weeks, or as needed. These services for patients outside of the hospital have close communication with the community palliative team, the patients GP and other community-based practitioners. The entire service provides patients with structured support both on the ward or at home.

The Palliative Care Team within the Oncology Department was also an important part of the whole palliative care service at Monash Health. Prof Poon invited me to observe the Palliative Team within the Oncology Department at Moorabbin Hospital where I participated in the ward round and MDT meeting for cancer patients. It was very useful for me to see palliative care professionals taking an active part in the MDT meeting within the Oncology Department, seeing them provide specific palliative care advice for cancer patients when needed. In addition, I also had the opportunity to take part in grand rounds where I visited the Onco-Pain Clinic, to understand more about the Advance Care Planning procedure and other related activities.

## Palliative care research

The research project which I took part in was “Integrating PROMs into supportive and palliative care to facilitate high quality pro-active patient centred supportive care”. This project is an implementation research study which is a new area for me. Working together with Prof Peter Poon and the group members, I became familiar with the implementation research strategies, including survey design, interview procedures, content translation and qualitative data analysis, etc. In order to support the project, a rapid literature review was performed. I learned again the systematic methods of completing a literature review from the librarian at Monash Health and then completed the literature review. In addition, I also participated in lab meetings and a journal club as part of the Palliative Care Research Group.

## **Conclusion**

The ESMO Palliative Care Fellowship provided me with an excellent opportunity to improve my knowledge of palliative care. I felt very lucky to be part of Prof Peter Poon’s research group and the Palliative Care Team at Monash Health, where I gained valuable experience in palliative care training. I believe this experience will help to improve my work capacity and expand my knowledge in the oncology and palliative care field, and as a Chief Physician of Medical Oncology in my institute, I will try to transfer my learning to improve palliative care delivery within my institute’s oncology setting. Moreover, I hope with this new relationship with the Monash Palliative Care team to create a link between Monash Health and my home hospital which may further improve the palliative care situation in P.R. China.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to take this opportunity to give my thanks and appreciation to Prof Peter Poon for hosting me during my visit at Monash Health and for his excellent arrangement during the fellowship. I would also like to thank the whole Palliative Care Team at Monash Health and thank my home hospital for supporting me while I was on leave to complete my fellowship.

