

Innovative and integrative approaches in supportive care

Home institute

Sapienza University of Rome
Department of Molecular Medicine
Viale Regina Elena, 324
00161 Rome
Italy



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA



Host institute

Instituto de Tratamiento Integral de Cancer (ITIC)
Hospital Clinica Benidorm (HCB)
Avda. Alfonso Puchades, 8
03501 Benidorm(Alicante)
Spain



Project topic

Training in palliative care research including participation in active clinical trials related to palliative care in patients with cancer and application of integrative approaches in the management of the most relevant symptoms in the supportive care setting.

Introduction

I wished to go to the Hospital Clinica Benidorm (HCB) because this hospital aims to achieve integration of many different aspects of oncology. Nowadays, it is very important the concept of integral oncology, so that the patient may receive supportive therapy, together with specific therapies or palliative care, including psychological aspects. Moreover, the disposability of Dr. José Manuel Cervera Grau to accept my request was very decisive to complete my training in a so relevant ESMO Palliative Care Designated Center.

Goals or aims

- Training in tools and methods in palliative care research.
- Assessment and management of cancer-related poly-symptomatology in clinical practice.
- Multidisciplinary therapeutic strategies in integrative and palliative care.

Description of the time spent at host institute

The ESMO Palliative Care Fellowship enabled me to spend a 6-week-period at the Instituto de Tratamiento Integral de Cancer (ITIC) of the Clinica-Hospital of Benidorm in Spain, a world class research institution among the ESMO Designated Centers of Integrated Oncology and Palliative Care. The center was extremely hospitable, offering me accommodation just near the hospital. My objective was to acquire training in tools and methods in palliative care research and experience for an optimal integration of the activities of all the palliative care team, both for on- and off-therapy patients.

In the Oncology Department, Dr. Cervera Grau works together with two other oncologists, Dr Esquedo Galiana and Dr Barrajon Martin de la Sierra, who divide and share fields of interests and different malignancies, organizing all the work in a very careful way, with the support of a psychologist and very professional nurses.

I participated in all the daily activities of the Oncology Unit, under the supervision of Dr. Cervera Grau, including visits to patients and educational activities. Among the educational activities I would like to mention the great opportunity to participate as co-author in the new edition of the Manual of Supportive Care in Cancer Patient and in the lymphoma section of the Manual of Diagnosis, Staging and Prognosis of Cancer. In addition, it was possible for me to publish articles in international journals and to participate in the editorial board of the international oncology journal REGIO published by Elsevier. Moreover it was offered for me to participate in multiple relevant conferences, such as the post ASCO conference in Barcelona, the NSCLC updating congress in Elche and the lymphoma meeting in Alicante, thus enhancing the integration with other oncologists of neighbouring cities.

During the fellowship it was possible to understand the importance of the assessment and management of cancer-related poly-symptomatology in clinical practice, learning to distinguish between disease-related and drug-related symptoms.

I understood how it is important in order to guarantee an adequate quality of life, even in the end-of-life setting.

All the oncologists involved and included me in their daily activities, on the ward and externally with patient visits, explaining their clinical practice and answering my questions. During the ward visits, it was very useful to talk with the psychologist, Dr. Macarena Espinoza, the nurses and the patient's relatives, in order to better understand the medical aspects of every individual within a complete psychosocial context. Therefore, the work was very stimulating and I could learn a lot from the experience of Dr. Cervera Grau and his colleagues.

The hospital is involved in numerous experimental trials, one of which is about a new psychological support to cancer patients, the Virtual Reality System. This is a phase II clinical study which aims to develop a Virtual Reality system in order to facilitate the induction of positive emotional states in cancer patients admitted to the hospital. This is the first clinical trial focusing therapeutic promotion of emotional state of cancer patients in the hospital setting. It is a very difficult and delicate work to perform with patients who have life-threatening disease. On the other hand, it seems to emphasize the importance of greater levels of wellness in such patients and the opportunity to gain this aim with innovative tools. All patients who fulfilled the inclusion criteria of the OncoHelp study had the opportunity to be involved in the Virtual Reality System protocol and I could follow each step of this approach. It seemed to me a feasible and effective system in a comprehensive approach of neoplastic disorders.

Conclusion

I am so grateful to ESMO for the great opportunity offered to me, during which I could see how Dr. Cervera Grau and his collaborators develop most of their works, how they applied their attention on new strategies of supporting patients with cancer, in every step of their life, working alongside them. I think that all this kind of work is made possible because of their innovative way of studying Palliative Care.

Since I returned to Italy, I have been collaborating with the entire group in a very proactive way. Moreover, I have started using what I learnt in my clinical practice, with great improvements in the management of patients. I really hope to have new opportunities like this in the future in order to improve my clinical practice, maybe for a longer period of time so to develop new research projects.