

ESMO Palliative Care Fellowship (Aug 2023 – Sep 2023)

Dinh Cong Le

FINAL REPORT

Home Institute: Hanoi Oncology Hospital, Hanoi, Vietnam

Host Institute: MacKay Memorial Hospital, Taiwan

Mentor: Chun-Kai Fang

Introduction

I have worked as a medical oncologist for more than 10 years at Hanoi Oncology Hospital, and I have passed through all the medical oncology departments within our hospital. Following this, I found the thing that confronted me the most was the suffering of terminal-stage cancer patients. Therefore, I decided to move to work at the Palliative Care Department in April 2022, with a desire to provide a better quality of life for end-stage cancer patients and their relatives within my hospital. However, palliative care is still a challenging field within our hospital, as well as in Vietnam, where inpatients in central oncology hospitals are often overcrowded, while the service of hospice care and home-based palliative care is still not developed in public hospitals. Moreover, multi-specialised collaboration in palliative care is still modest; this not only leads to the unavailability of adequate care for cancer patients but also to the burnout of palliative oncologists and nurses. I have always had a desire to upgrade my expertise in hospice and palliative care by learning from international prestigious hospice and palliative care centres. My dream came true when I was awarded the ESMO Palliative Care Fellowship at the MacKay Hospice and Palliative Care Centre, MacKay Memorial Hospital (MMH), Taiwan.

Goals or aims

My goals in two months of learning in the MMH are:

1. Learn how to set up and monitor the service of hospice care and home-based palliative care service. I hope after the course, I can initially establish and operate a hospice care and home-based palliative care team at my hospital.
2. Learn about controlling severe symptoms in end-stage cancer patients.
3. Learn how to operate and collaborate effectively in a multi-specialist tumour board (oncologists, psychologists, social workers, nurses...) to provide comprehensive care for cancer patients in palliative care.
4. Learn about the integration of palliative care into primary healthcare facilities.

Description of the time spent at host institute

During two months of observation at the MMH, I had a great opportunity to experience most of the hospice and palliative care activities for terminally ill patients, including cancer patients and non-cancer patients. MMH provides a comprehensive hospice and palliative care system for patients through four main activities: hospice care, shared care, home care, and outpatient care (OPD). Therefore, patients with terminal illnesses not only experience well-controlled physical symptoms but also receive psychological, social, and spiritual care through the professional coordination of a team of experts including palliative oncologists, psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, and bereavement care workers. Moreover, well-trained volunteers and caregivers also actively participate in caring for patients and family members. I was so impressed with the way the staff and volunteers took care of patients and relatives, not only because of their high expertise, but also their kindness and respect for those who receive care. Although communicating in Chinese with patients and family members was difficult for me at times, I could easily feel their satisfaction through their facial expressions and eyes. That was so amazing!

Conclusion

Two months of fellowship at the MMH is not a very long time, but it has made a worthwhile change not only to my perspective on hospice and palliative care but also to my career, my mind, and my life.

Acknowledgments

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