

THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL CANCER ADVISORY BOARD IN CANCER CONTROL

Prof. Dr. İbrahim Güllü*

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nurullah Zengin**

* Chairman of the National Cancer Advisory Board, Lecturer in Hacettepe University, Faculty of Medicine Department of Medical Oncology

** Vice Chairman of the National Cancer Advisory Board, Head of Ankara Numune Training and Research Hospital Medical Oncology Clinic

Cancer is one of the most significant health problems in all over the world and in Turkey. The psycho-social trauma that it causes in patients and their relatives, and its treatment success which is far from being satisfactory in a considerable group of patients makes cancer perceived as a fearful disease. It is possible to talk about a series of issues that increase the significance of the subject. For example, cancer is a group of diseases which is highly preventable. Environmental factors, notably nutrition and smoking, are known to be involved in more than half of the cancer cases. Furthermore, cancer is a disease whose frequency increases depending on various reasons. As to the economic dimension of the issue, increase in treatment costs day after day is an unavoidable fact.

All these remarks put on the agenda the need for establishment and implementation of a Cancer Policy for each country. That the cancer priorities of countries differ for each country renders it impossible to copy the cancer policy of another country. Each country will be able to arrive at an implementable cancer policy as far as it is able to identify its own priorities and properly direct its resources.

Cancer is a fact which has many dimensions from prevention to treatment. Reckoning with all dimensions of the issue, making a healthy assessment, and following up of up-to-date developments requires a study that can only be conducted by a large team. The National Cancer Advisory Board has come to the agenda upon such a perspective. Evaluation of all accumulation of information available on cancer, notably of the academic circles, and communication of the identified problems and suggested solutions to the enforcement authorities

constitutes the main mission of this board. With the circular of 30 May 2005, which lays down the structuring and fields of duty of the board, it is stipulated that it shall conduct its studies primarily by means of its subcommittees. The subcommittees and their fields of duty are as follows:

1) Preventive Oncology Subcommittee: The fact that cancer is a disease which is preventable to a considerable extent renders the concept of protection from cancer one of the main issues of the national policy to be established in relation to cancer. Providing the public with accurate information and “awareness raising” on cancer prevention are our main priorities in order to achieve success in our fight against cancer.

2) Epidemiology and Registry Subcommittee: One of the main factors of the policy to be established in relation to cancer is, no doubt, to have sound data. Until recently, it was a fact that there were serious problems in attaining data on Turkey in relation to this issue. Support and accurate guidance to the progress made recently in this issue shall enable access to accurate data on cancer and placing of cancer policies on a safe ground.

3) Medical Geology Subcommittee: It is known that some environmental factors pose risks of cancer. Asbestos exposure and pleural mesothelioma continue to be a specific issue in Turkey. Identification of the role of environmental factors in Turkey in formation of cancer as a whole and making decision of what to do on this issue are defined as the field of task of this subcommittee.

4) Early Diagnosis and Screening Subcommittee: Diagnosis of cancer at an early stage is the most significant factor that determines the success of the treatment. In some cancers, it is demonstrated that early diagnosis on the basis of screening methods are practically possible and beneficial. However, it is also acknowledged that the priorities and forms of implementations may differ according to the regions. Determination of where and on the basis of which principles should cancer screening be conducted in Turkey and interpretation of screening results are defined as the field of task of this subcommittee.

5) Treatment and Ethics Subcommittee: Treatment of a cancer already developed is accepted as the third and a more difficult stage in cancer control, following screening and early diagnosis. Cancer treatment almost always requires cooperation of more than one medical branch. Identification of the problems encountered in cancer treatment and in relation to ethical issues and development of suggestions of solution are planned as within the scope of the responsibility of this subcommittee.

6) Psycho-Social Support and Training Subcommittee: Cancer also brings along psycho-social problems for the patient and the relatives.

It is aimed to develop suggestions of solutions in line with the socio-cultural characteristics of Turkey.

7) Clinical Research Subcommittee: Among all branches of medicine, oncology is the field in which most clinical research is conducted. With the studies of this subcommittee, a proper guidance of the cancer research in Turkey and development of suggestions of solutions to the problems encountered in clinical research are aimed at.

8) Alternative and Complementary Medicine Subcommittee: That alternative methods in cancer are frequently used in all over the world is a fact that cannot be neglected. To evaluate these methods on the basis of scientific data, to raise awareness in the society, and to make efforts for uninterrupted implementation of scientific treatment are identified as the tasks of this subcommittee.

9) Human Resources Subcommittee: Cancer control requires organization in all aspects. With this respect, determination of problems in relation to the physical conditions, structuring and human resources of the centers is defined as the duty of this subcommittee.

We believe that, on the basis of the valuable studies to be conducted by our committees and with the implementation of their suggestions, a National Cancer Policy in consideration of the priorities of cancer will be formulated.

