

PERSPECTIVES OF TURKISH MEDICAL SCHOOL STUDENTS ON CANCER, CANCER TREATMENTS, PALLIATIVE CARE, AND THE ONCOLOGISTS: ARES STUDY.

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Introduction - Purpose: Cancer is one of the most common causes of death all over the World. It is crucial to diagnose this disease early, by affective screening methods and also it is very important to acknowledge the community on various aspects of this disease such as the treatment methods and palliative care. Not only the oncologists, but every medical doctor should be educated well, on dealing with cancer patients. Previous studies suggested various opinions on the level of oncology education in the medical schools. In this study the perspectives of medical students on cancer, its treatment, palliative care and the oncologists were analyzed in relation to their educational status.

Methods - Tools: A multi-center survey analyses was performed on a total of 4224 medical school students that accepted to enter this study, in Turkey. After the questions about the demographical characteristics of the students, their perspectives on the definition, diagnosis, screening and, treatment methods of cancer and their way of understanding metastatic disease as well as palliative care were analyzed. The questionnaire was including questions with answers and a scoring system of Likert type 5 (absolutely disagree=1 – completely agree=5). In the last part of the questionnaire there were some words to detect what the words "cancer" and "oncologist" meant for the students. The participant students were analyzed in two study groups; "Group 1" (n=1.255) were phase I and II students that had never attended an oncology lesson, and "Group 2" (n=2.969) were phase III to VI students that had attended the oncology lessons in the medical school. SPSS v17 was used as a database and for the statistical analyzes. A value of $p < 0.05$ was noted as statistically significant.

Findings: Group 1 defined cancer as a contagious disease ($p = 0.00025$), they believed that early diagnosis was never possible ($p = 0.042$), all people with a diagnosis of cancer would certainly die ($p = 0.044$) and chemotherapy was not successful in metastatic disease ($p = 0.003$) as compared to Group 2. The rate of the students that believed gastric cancer screening was a part of the National screening policy were significantly more in Group 1 than Group 2 ($p = 0.00014$). Group 2 had a higher anxiety level for themselves or their family members to become a cancer patient. Most of the students in both groups defined the medical oncologists as a warrior (57% in Group 1 and 40% in Group 2; $p = 0.097$) and cancer was reminding them "death" (54% in Group 1 and 48% in Group 2; $p = 0.102$).

Discussion: This study suggested that oncology education was useful for the students' understanding of cancer and related issues, however; the level of oncology education should be

improved in medical schools in Turkey. This would be helpful for the medical doctors to cope with many aspects of cancer as a major health care problem in this country.

Keywords: tıp fakóltesi öđrencisi, kanser, tedaviler, onkologlar.