

Cancer Path
In
Switzerland

Needs assessment study

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Prevalence, complexity, and costs of cancer care are increasing in Switzerland. This phenomenon is also found in numerous comparable countries but the case of Switzerland may have particularities due to the requirements and conditions of its health care system. Evidence exists that losses in efficiency, waste of resources and inadequate attribution may be hampering the results that could be expected.

This needs assessment study aimed to determine the possibilities for improvement in the whole cancer course from prevention to palliation. Particular focus has been placed on patients' perspectives to reach out for an efficient and sustainable cancer management.

METHODOLOGY

A literature review focused on the Swiss context has been performed via PubMed and Google Scholar, as well as through the main official Swiss and cantonal health websites using the key words "cancer services organization", "cancer center", "cancer multidisciplinary team", "healthcare system" and "patients/family perspectives", in the three main languages of the country.

A quali-quantitative survey with a special focus on cancer and on patients' perspectives and needs has been developed. Key stakeholders were selected based on their expertise in different areas of the cancer path pre and post COVID-19 pandemic and assessed through interviews. Subsequently, a DELPHI-like method was applied, followed by two focus groups. 27 key opinion leaders (KOL) have participated, with a significantly high response rate of 90%.

RESULTS

The assessment was well received by stakeholders and interviews had very high participation rate and commitment. Several cross-cutting issues arose as a result of our analysis.

There is a prominent need for collaboration and trans-sectoral action in cancer, encompassing clinical disciplines, communication strategies, bureaucratic continuity, professional attitudes, payment scenarios, data collection and many other areas. In almost all interviews, a lack of collaboration or a hindrance to optimal collaboration at different levels has been emphasized (Figure 1).

The necessity and the demand for collaboration meets a highly fragmented landscape of cancer care in Switzerland due to the federalist political organization of the country as well as the health insurance and payment systems.



Figure 1. Collaboration and trans-sectoral actions need ¹

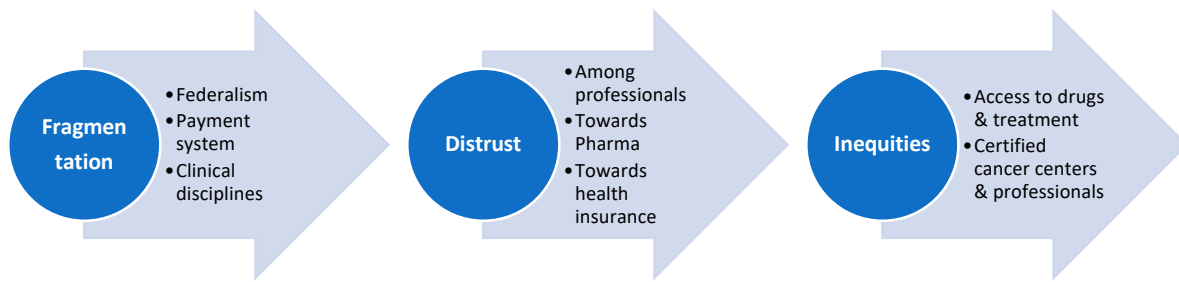


Figure 2: Main challenges related to the Swiss cancer path

The cancer path as a whole is most probably only understood with a complete overview by very few people, thus rendering any action for change very difficult.

On the medical side, collaboration and teamwork is not well implemented with instead a hierarchical organization of medical care entities and a lot of competition. In such a system, the communication is also fragmented. The hidden inequity in health care system only becomes evident when rigorous and specific analysis is conducted such as for off-label anticancer drugs

The fragmentation leads to a lack of transparency at different levels including also lack of data. As a general impression, stakeholders did not address it directly, but all expressed distrust to one or the other partners of the health care system. The credibility of partners such as health insurance companies, pharmaceutical industry, but also professional organizations is challenged (Figure 2). COVID-19 made these gaps more visible and highlighted the need to develop a new systematic approach and contingency plan to protect the most vulnerable.

The need for change was a common statement among the participants; most of them showed small scale changes, such as the buddy support team or intersectoral PhD programs on the cancer path, or proposed modifications of existing structures. The leading change agents envisioned frequently included the Swiss Cancer League, whilst the role of the BAG was seen as rather limited when it comes to whole system changes.

CONCLUSIONS

Pressing developments are happening in the healthcare system given the rising prevalence of some cancers, the demographics of the Swiss population, the growing number of cancer survivors and the long term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. More fundamental solutions should be developed and implemented in Switzerland to face those challenges, meet patients' needs and increase health outcomes.

A prerequisite for any sustainable change is trust-building. Several steps are needed to build trust; business as usual approach will not be effective at short, middle, and long term.

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If you would like to receive the entire report, please contact switzerland@all-can.org. It is available free of charge.

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