

Cancer Care Pathways – A Directorate for cancer patients and their families



Around 2000 new cases of cancer are registered yearly in the Maltese Islands. The average number of male cancer cases per year is 944, while 964 females are diagnosed yearly with cancer. On average, the most common cancer sites by incidence for males include the prostate, lung, colorectum and urinary bladder, while those cancer sites ranked highest by incidence for females are namely breast, colorectal, uterus and lung cancers.

The number of cancer incidence as well as the experiences and feedback from patients and relatives are the factors that have motivated the new Cancer Care Pathways Directorate to plan models of care to achieve a more positive impact across cancer services. The Director of Cancer Care Pathways, Ms. Danika Marmara' has read for an MSc at Kingston University London and now reads for a PhD in Health and Cancer Care at the University of Stirling. Ms. Marmara' now leads this innovative Cancer Care Pathways Directorate and is working on aspects of care to offer support, guide and help increase access to care for cancer patients. As part of its pathway, aspects of patient needs must be continuously explored as cancer has several implications towards family life, social life and consequently society in general.

Aim of the Cancer Care Pathways Directorate

Cancer Care spans the whole patient pathway from screening or initial referral for a symptom to cancer diagnosis to cancer treatment followed by survivorship, palliative care or end-of-life to improve patient experiences and outcomes across the patient journey. On an

organisational level, it aims to illustrate patient flows through the different phases of the cancer care pathways for various cancer patients with the aim of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the current service provision and improve cancer pathways.

In this regard, this directorate has commenced work on the following aspects:

- Identifying gaps in services and improve care coordination for cancer patients and their families to improve quality and timely care;
- Improving communication and networking between various organisations/hospitals/entities such as Primary Care, Screening programme, Mater Dei Hospital, Oncology services and NGOs;
- Research audits have commenced to provide evidence regarding cancer pathways and timelines for breast and colorectal pathways to provide direction for implementing care coordination and other service improvements to achieve a better and optimised cancer journey experience;
- Improving coordination of Palliative patients;
- Improving patient information in the treatment stage and any other information gaps in cancer services;
- Identifying survivorship issues through patient needs post-treatment. This research work and patient feedback shall provide a basis for the vision of the New National Cancer Plan starting 2016;
- Identifying barriers to screening programmes to increase uptake rates.

Ms. Danika Marmara' has recently spearheaded a working group entitled 'Tailored Information in Cancer Care' (TICC). This working group has developed cancer treatment booklets for breast, colorectal, early prostate and primary lung cancers. These booklets are the first set of written resources involving a multidisciplinary team approach in the treatment stage of the cancer journey, a stage where previously local tailored information was lacking for different cancer types. From feedback received from the healthcare professionals and patients alike, these booklets have been identified as offering clear, well-written and patient-friendly information that will be used to complement verbal information by the patient's medical team. More work is in progress in Malta to develop resources where patient needs are being identified.