Report on oncogeriatric activities in Belgium

Dr Lore Decoster

1. Cindy Kenis published on my request a report of the SIOG 2014 meeting in the Belgian Journal of Medical Oncology (Bel J Med Oncol 2015; 9(1):42-43; see attachment). This journal is distributed to all medical oncologists in Belgium. With this report we wanted to give all medical oncologists an update of the passed SIOG conference and we also announced the upcoming SIOG 2015 meeting.
2. In Belgium the Ministry of Health launched in 2012 a Cancer plan including an oncogeriatric initiative. A total of 17 projects were selected for this initiative. From 2012 till 2015 approximately 12000 patients have benefited from a oncogeriatric approach within these projects. The Cancer plan ended in June 2015 and final analysis are currently ongoing. Unfortunately, so far, no further financial initiative has been made by the governement to assure further oncogeriatric evaluation for older cancer patients. We do believe that the Cancer Plan has established a cooperation between geriatricians and oncologists which may last even without financial rewarding, however we are worried that many efforts will be lost. In some hospitals this is already the case because the person coordinating the project has left the team because of lack of finances.
3. The Cancer Plan focussing on oncogeriatrics also included the establishement of a scientifical committee, including oncologists (dr L Decoster, prof dr H Wildiers, dr F Cornelis) and geriatricians (dr K Van Puyvelde, dr N Van de Walle, prof dr J Flamaing and dr P Cornette) . Members of this committee, published in collaboration with members from SIOG, guidelines on screening tools (L Decoster et al Ann Oncol 2015;26:288-300) and geriatric assessment (H Wildiers et al J Clin Oncol 2014;5:431-8). A third review paper on geriatric intervention is in preparation (F Cornelis).
4. The scientifical committee of the Cancer Plan is organizing a symposium on oncogeriatrics in Belgium. This symposium will give an update of the recently published SIOG guidelines on screening tools, geriatric assessment and geriatric interventions and will also highlight all Belgian projects over the past years. See attachment for program. The invitations are widely dispersed among oncologists, geriatricians, general practicionars and nurses. In addition the symposium is considered as mandatory for all oncologists in training, as part of their post graduate course.
5. The scientifical committee of the Cancer Plan has also had a meeting with the Ministry of health to discuss the future of oncogeriatrics in Belgium. Due to budgettary reasons, it seems that oncogeriatrics is currently not a priority for our Minister. For that reason, we have decided to write a letter to the Minister herself explaining the past efforts and our view for future implementation of oncogeriatric evaluation in older cancer patients.