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Abstract 1304: Employing widening funds to address inequity in cancer research - example of the STEPUPIORS collaborative rectal cancer project FREE

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Abstract

Introduction: Treatment of locally advanced rectal cancer (LARC) using neoadjuvant chemoradiotherapy (nCRT) improves local control and survival, but response varies. Patients treated at the Institute for Oncology and Radiology of Serbia (IORS) who undergo surgery upon complete response might be exposed to risks and poor quality of life. A consortium dedicated to redefining prognostic and predictive biomarkers in rectal cancer was formed within the framework of the STEPUPIORS Horizon Europe project. The current study evaluated whether employing collaborative widening funds might lead to sustainable strategies for cancer treatment, lowering inequity and steering societal impact, especially in countries with limited resources, using a pilot rectal cancer project.

Patients and Methods: The analysis was performed in the period Oct 01, 2022, to Oct 01, 2023, with a Serbian coordinating institution and partners from Spain, Greece, and the Netherlands as expert twinning centers. RT was administered to 75 patients with LARC using volumetric modulated arc therapy-simultaneous integrated boost approach/concomitant chemotherapy (5FU/Leucovorin, week 1&5) for the first time in Serbia. A comprehensive approach towards building human capacities on biobanking, multiomics analyses and project management was developed through intensive training and expert visits. Consensus consortium decisions were reached on regular partner meetings.

Results: Patients with clinical complete response (16.0%) and initially distant-located tumors were enrolled in the watch and wait approach and are under follow up. Developed pipelines for multiomics analyses led to 4 high-quality papers on new predictive biomarkers to nCRT in LARC and the deposition of omics data in open-science repositories following FAIR data

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principles. A first Serbian cancer research center was successfully installed. Fifteen IORS researchers (87% female) management office was established to provide anc ch projects. This led to 5 new grant applications an a Masters program for Management in the Health

Conclusion: This study sh year collaborative grant de educational and treatment 3). The results highlight th addressed by progressing

Systematic, long-term strategic initiatives and collaborations among relevant stakeholders and ethical, legal and societal struc : needed in more countries.

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