

Research and development: a way forward for oncology pharmacy

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Oncology pharmacy must develop and improve for the benefit of patients with cancer and society in general.

The aims of a scientific society such as ESOP to foster professionalism and raise standards are fundamental. ESOP's continuing achievements are presented annually at the joint scientific meeting of the society and the German Oncology Pharmacy Society (DGOP). Practice and information must be based on scientific evidence as well as validated experience. Therefore, research and development in oncology pharmacy, as in other medical and pharmaceutical sciences, is essential for further progress.

Research:

- must be of high quality and focused on improving cancer treatment and knowledge and improving the patient's situation
- must have both pharmaceutical and medical relevance, be clearly formulated, well structured and fully documented
- results should be disseminated to the scientific world and to oncology pharmacy
- should be open to all, and
- relies on expert oncology pharmacists to provide support and supervision.

The oath 'not to hurt' is a leading objective.

Delegates from all ESOP countries were asked about research activities in a recent survey. There are only a few sites with ongoing studies within laboratory sciences such as pharmacokinetics and stability and compatibility of cytotoxic drugs. A compelling exception is the pharmacy at Karolinska Hospital in Stockholm, Sweden, where for more than 30 years a department has conducted chemistry and pharmacokinetic studies on cytotoxic drugs in close collaboration with the clinics. Other pharmacies in the uni-

versity hospitals in Sweden have been able to pursue similar projects. Other highly active centres can be found in Germany and at the Department of Pharmacy and Toxicology at CHU Henri Mondor in Paris, France, headed by Professor Alain Astier, Vice President of ESOP. The CHU Henri Mondor Centre has excellent equipment for analysing cytotoxic drugs at very low concentrations. This centre is also a part of a university institution, the usual setting for these activities.

Other countries are engaged in patient surveys, validation of projects to improve patient support, medical error surveillance and pharmaco-economic studies. Those surveyed suggested a number of areas in which ESOP should initiate research (see Table 1).

People were generally interested in undertaking R & D in oncology pharmacy providing that resources and time were available. It is a hard and difficult decision that may require a lot of imagination and endeavour to get started. However, results 'don't grow on trees' or in Swedish *Du skall inte förvänta att stekta sparvar flyger in i din mun*. A scientific project would increase your competence, your professionalism and generate a lot of enjoyment. You should start small - remember advice and support are around the corner. At present there are several oncology research projects with funding from the drug industry, for example, on oral chemotherapy. Often interdisciplinary collaboration is required and this might hamper some progress. However, working together with other healthcare professionals is a challenge that may widen the remit of oncology pharmacy. Local funding and collaboration with patient organisations are other options. Activities are numerous. You could start small by introducing an easy exercise programme for patients with fatigue, monitoring the efficacy of pain relief or improving therapy for emesis following cytotoxic drugs. A multicentre clinical trial is already being planned by ESOP for patients with breast cancer.

In conclusion, R & D is a priority for ESOP. Initiatives are being taken to start and support a variety of projects. Participation will help not only cancer patients and society, but also participants as their competence grows.

Table 1: Areas of research in oncology pharmacy

Area	Number of countries interested
Stability and compatibility of cytotoxic drugs in admixtures	5
Pharmacokinetics - Pharmacodynamics to improve cytotoxic drug dosing	4
Clinical evaluation of dose banding	4
Medical errors	3
Patient information and counselling	3
Pharmaco-economic validation of cytotoxic drug cost	2
Safe preparation and handling of cytotoxic drugs, oral cytotoxics, guidelines for support therapy, role of pharmacist in the team	1 each

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