



AECA

American Eurasian
Cancer Alliance

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2020

**Global Oncology
Community Thrives
Through Digital Connections**



*U.S. and Eurasian Counterparts
Virtually Review Cancer Cases*

STRATEGIC COLLABORATIONS IN CANCER CONTROL

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Readers,

As we continue to navigate through this difficult and rapidly evolving environment of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), our hearts go out to those who have been infected with the virus and those whose lives have been disrupted by this outbreak. We are already seeing how this pandemic is affecting access to care for millions around the world, including one particularly vulnerable population – cancer patients.

Things that should be easy and routine, like getting a prescription or making a doctor’s appointment, are more complicated. Many lifesaving clinical trials are now on hold due to concerns around healthcare shortages and risk of exposure. Accessing palliative care--which was already difficult in many places--is now even more so.

Amid the stress and uncertainty, it’s never been more critical for the global cancer control community to stay connected, even as we practice physical distancing to reduce disease transmission. During this complex time, AECA has been fortunate enough to leverage the strong personal relationships and scientific partnerships that have been forged over decades of collaboration between the U.S. and Eurasian cancer control communities.

Noting the necessity for more frequent communication than annual summits or conventions would allow, AECA began cultivating virtual partnerships years ago, which now serve as instrumental tools to ensure continuity of our global programs. Cohorts of medical specialists focused on gynecological oncology, urology, and palliative care continue to utilize tele-health platforms to disseminate case-based learning and advisory services. Recent international exchanges have emphasized the importance of unified data management systems, which would allow for the continuous release of valuable data, easing the burden of physical or fiscal constraints.

I’m proud that despite these challenging circumstances, AECA will continue to capitalize on important investments that have already been made, and continue to leverage our wide network to ensure the global cancer control community is able to accelerate advancements in cancer research and treatment. We are committed to strengthening health systems and services, with the ultimate goal to improve people’s lives. I look forward to continuing in this pursuit with our valued partners around the globe.

Sophia Michaelson, PhD

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY IN THE GLOBAL EFFORT TO IMPROVE CANCER CARE

As the cancer control community becomes increasingly global, medical researchers and practitioners rely further on technology to review challenging cases, discuss best practices, and collaborate on innovative projects. AECA has developed and actively supports these virtual knowledge exchanges between U.S. and Eurasian stakeholders on topics such as gynecological oncology and palliative care, unifying medical expertise from both regions.



“Our virtual knowledge-sharing sessions have been incredibly valuable, not only to the patients and communities that benefit from new perspectives and diverse clinical experiences, but to our own gynecological oncologists that have the opportunity to learn about novel diagnosis and treatment trends from experts around the world.”

*Dr. Dilyara Kaidarova, Executive Director
Kazakh National Institute of Oncology and Radiology (KazIOR)*



Throughout the years, AECA has encouraged Eurasian countries to join the International Gynecologic Cancer Society (IGCS) Strategic Alliance Partner Program to further communicate and collaborate on research and treatment of oncological gynecology related conditions. Several of these gynecological societies – including those from Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia – now serve as highly active participants in Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) discussions. National representatives have participated in more than 40 sessions focused on cervical, ovarian, and endometrial cancers. Not only do participating countries increase capacity along the cancer control continuum, but gynecological societies also become regional experts for knowledge exchange with neighboring and partner countries, further expanding Eurasian research and clinical treatment networks. For example, a gynecological oncology ECHO exchange between the U.S. and Kazakhstan, a strategic use of time and money without forfeiting valuable information sharing, also saw ancillary participation from Mongolian healthcare professionals; colleagues from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan were also invited.

To capitalize on the sharing of valuable information in gynecological oncology, a digital platform plans to launch within the next few months in order to store educational materials for all partner sites. The new resource will collect information shared during ECHO sessions, as well as provide a private forum where each country, region, or working group can communicate about related topics. This new feature will be particularly useful in capturing vital information about various clinical trials conducted across Eurasia, including unique research projects focused on topics such as conservative treatment of early endometrial cancer to preserve fertility in Russia and cervical cancer surgical approach trials in Kazakhstan, both of which may result in clinical implications for oncological treatment around the globe.

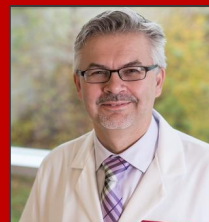


Gynecology ECHO Session

Participants include Harvard Medical School (USA), Barzilai Medical Center (Israel), Mayo Clinic (USA), Juravinski Cancer Centre (Canada), Sheba Medical Center (Israel), N.N. Alexandrov National Cancer Center (Belarus), University of Toronto (Canada), and IGCS

Another recent AECA success in establishing critical connections between U.S. and Eurasian stakeholders focuses on the topic of palliative care. Recognizing the need to routinely convene global experts to discuss the latest research and trends, AECA partners, including representatives from Harvard University, Johns Hopkins University, Fox Chase Cancer Center, Indiana University, the Worldwide Hospice Palliative Care Alliance (WHPCA), and the Russian Hospice Care Professionals Association, established a virtual effort to discuss international research collaborations, review case studies, and to develop professional palliative care training programs.

"Participation in AECA offers many benefits for U.S. clinicians and researchers, including the ability to develop a shared scientific research agenda with international partners. The opportunity to explore novel clinical trials is a particularly promising endeavor, and one that has the potential to benefit patients around the globe. It has been profoundly satisfying to participate in these international interactions that may shape how chronic disease and end-of-life patients receive critical care."



*Dr. Marcin Chwistek, Director
Fox Chase Cancer Center*

The launch of the initiative began with an educational case study focused on a patient with progressively-worsening dyspnea and idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, and the discussion addressed both physical and emotional health concerns in an effort to discuss areas to improve the holistic treatment of palliative care patients. While nearly half of all patients receiving end-of-life care experience dyspnea – characterized by difficulty in breathing persisting at rest or with minimal exertion – opioids are often not administered due to fear of side effects. Though the presentation highlighted a postmortem evaluation, the information interchange served as an example for Eurasian and U.S. healthcare providers on the importance of analgesic availability and dispelling certain myths to protect patients from unnecessary suffering.

WHPCA and AECA are also collaborating with Russian stakeholders on cooperative palliative care research. Early efforts are underway to conduct clinical trials on essential medicines, but the group is also helping to create a health services research infrastructure in Russia to ensure the viability of strong clinical partnerships. The foundation of this effort is the creation of a nationwide data set in



Virtual Palliative Care Research Discussion

Participants from AECA, WHPCA, and the Russian Hospice Association discuss clinical trials and international research infrastructure

in Russia with standardized measures, which would allow researchers to evaluate the impact of palliative care within the health system. The dataset aims to align with internationally-recognized measures, establishing the ability to compare global operations and outcomes data, while also increasing the possibility for palliative care research and collaboration opportunities to expand beyond current U.S. and Eurasian relationships.

AECA will continue to support virtual knowledge and data exchanges between international partners, as it has proved to be a valuable resource for researchers and physicians in pursuing novel clinical studies, disseminating results through conference presentations and journal publications, and improving patient care around the world.

FORGING SCIENTIFIC PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH U.S. – EURASIA EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

As a connecting force for scientific entities, AECA unites cancer control specialists from around the world in order to foster collaboration in pursuit of improving health outcomes for millions diagnosed with cancer each year. Building on decades of work in the gynecological oncology and palliative care space, AECA recently facilitated international exchanges that have already seen new programs and processes come to fruition.

Based on a multi-year coordination effort with stakeholders from Belarus, AECA was able to establish a program which allowed the Belarusian scientific community to receive a hands-on fellowship at the Levine Cancer Institute, a facility of Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte, North Carolina. The program provided the opportunity for N.N. Alexandrov National Cancer Center staff to participate in virtual tumor boards, clinical rounds alongside leading healthcare professionals, and operating room observation of surgical cases. The experience offered new skills and knowledge related to minimally-invasive, robot-assisted surgery; chemotherapy, immunotherapy, and targeted therapy; overall treatment planning for complex gynecologic cancer patients; research modalities; and infrastructure of a large U.S. medical center.



Levine Cancer Center imparts lessons in robot-assisted surgical techniques to Dr. Alexander Shushkevich of the N.N. Alexandrov National Cancer Center in Belarus

“The opportunities for future collaboration are many. I’m continuing to work with Dr. Shushkevich on a joint publication and through monthly tumor boards, and he is putting together a video series on robotics in Russian in order to transfer the knowledge he picked up during the exchange to regional groups. I’m grateful for this international cooperation; it allows us to step outside of our own patient care silos and lets us all see the larger picture.”

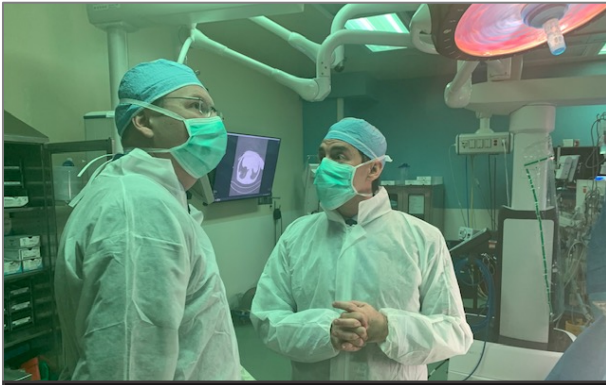
*Dr. Jubilee Brown, Gynecologic Oncologist
Levine Cancer Institute at Atrium Health*



Levine Cancer Center (Charlotte, North Carolina) leadership honoring the productive partnership with Belarusian colleagues

By building the institutional and individual capacity of international cancer centers, AECA and U.S. institutions develop strong partnerships that open up new avenues for basic science and clinical research collaborations. Besides targeted teach-the-teacher exchanges, AECA offers another service line focused on broader

educational experiences. In January, leadership from the N.N. Blokhin National Medical Research Center of Oncology in Russia visited two leading NCI-designated cancer centers, with objectives to identify opportunities for clinical and organizational alignment, as well as new educational pathways that could be brought back to Eurasian cancer research and treatment centers.



Medical experts from MD Anderson (Houston, Texas) and Blokhin (Moscow, Russia) explore latest trends in gynecological surgery practices

At MD Anderson Cancer Center and Johns Hopkins University, Russian gynecological leadership had the opportunity to shadow providers during clinical rounds and operating room cases, discuss didactic education opportunities with medical fellows, and participate in treatment plan discussions. As well as overall discussions outlining the status of cancer prevalence, research, and treatment in the U.S. and Russia, more detailed conversations outlined research opportunities that plan to be conducted between the organizations.

As a result of the visit, MD Anderson and Blokhin came to consensus in regard to participation in an international, multi-site randomized clinical trial on the use of laparoscopic surgery for interval debulking for advanced

ovarian cancer. The trial, known as Laparoscopic Cytoreduction After Neoadjuvant ChEmotherapy (LANCE), could provide a new treatment option for hundreds of thousands of women diagnosed with one of the most common gynecologic cancers that has the highest mortality rate.

Conversations around collaborative opportunities between MD Anderson and Blokhin led to the topic of clinical data management. The Houston, Texas-based cancer center outlined the organization's data collection principles, as well as provided a demonstration of the collection methods. Russian counterparts are currently considering a new platform that would create a unified system with compatible data, allowing for additional research opportunities between leading Russian and U.S. cancer institutes.



Drs. Sophia Michaelson and Robert Coleman, IGCS President Elect, discuss joint cancer control cooperation for years to come

Another collaborative opportunity identified with Johns Hopkins revolves around palliative care clinical protocols: a neuropathic pain trial using an algorithm to guide choices and another trial to test if mirtazapine increases appetite and weight gain in cancer cachexia. It's estimated that half of all patients with cancer eventually develop a syndrome of cachexia, or wasting syndrome, so the research outcomes could eventually improve clinical protocol and quality of life for millions of patients.



Drs. Alexey Shevchuk and Amanda Fader reflect on beneficial international exchange at Johns Hopkins (Baltimore, Maryland)

Based on interest from all stakeholders to bolster clinical research opportunities, AECA will coordinate projects solidified during the multi-site exchange and identify further multidisciplinary learning opportunities between U.S. and Eurasian researchers. By sharing a diverse spectrum of knowledge and experiences, global experts can leverage collaborative opportunities that aim to improve cancer research and care.

KAZAKHSTAN JOINS WORLDWIDE MOVEMENT TO RECOGNIZE CANCER CARE PROGRESS



For the past decade, AECA has supported programs to increase the visibility of Kazakhstan as a major player in oncology research and treatment. A steadily developing cancer research and treatment portfolio has allowed Kazakhstan – the 9th largest nation in the world – to become a strong scientific presence not only within Eurasia, but also the global cancer control community.

This AECA effort to bolster both visibility of and confidence in Kazakhstan cancer network partners helped encourage the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) to select the country as the host site for the 2019 World Cancer Leaders' Summit. Building on this momentum, the Kazakh Institute of Oncology and Radiology (KazIOR) took the opportunity to continue to raise awareness and showcase cancer control progress by participating in World Cancer Day.

Each year on February 4th, millions of cancer patients, practitioners, and advocates around the world take the time to recognize World Cancer Day in order to raise awareness, improve education, and spark action to reduce preventable cancer cases and provide more equitable cancer care treatment around the world. This year, Kazakhstan oncologists, NGOs, volunteers, and journalists participated in a wide range of activities throughout the county to raise awareness and show positive action in meeting the challenge of the global cancer burden.

The week leading up to the event, all cancer hospitals opened their doors for free check-ups to the public. More than 11,000 specialist consultations were performed, with identification of 183 cancer cases, 651 precancerous cases, and 2,965 other dangerous diseases. Healthcare professionals around the country took the opportunity to reflect on progress made with ongoing screening programs and improving cancer treatment, as well as to underscore the need for continued focus.

In total, hundreds of activities in Kazakhstan were completed, including 19 press conferences, 226 community activities, and more than 100 media mentions. On February 4, a national landmark in the country's capital – the Baiterek Tower – was lit up in blue and orange to honor World Cancer Day. Many also took to social media to reach not only regional audiences, but to connect with cancer control advocates around the world. Volunteers, cancer survivors, medical students, nonprofit organizations and more seized opportunity to join the UICC's 'I Am and I Will' campaign by making and sharing social media posts.



Based on AECA's continuous collaboration in the region, Kazakhstan has become a major player in the international cancer control community, displaying unprecedented participation in this year's World Cancer Day event. AECA will continue to remain committed to encourage Eurasian representatives to take strides toward increasing the understanding and application of cancer prevention and treatment.

Since 2001, AECA has provided turnkey solutions for international organizations seeking to conduct research or develop collaborations with stakeholders throughout Eurasia. Major areas of emphasis within AECA's portfolio include efforts to strengthen global cancer research, promote research training and education, and translate research into policy and programs.

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OUR MISSION

To pool the intellectual and scientific resources of member institutions to further research and discovery in cancer prevention, treatment strategies, and palliative care.

STRENGTHENING GLOBAL CANCER RESEARCH

AECA is a scientific facilitator in Eurasia, adept at securing resources to strengthen cancer research through engagement with Ministries of Health, leaders of research institutes, and other regional decision makers. AECA programs focus on enhancing the understanding of the biology and etiology of cancer, implementing effective strategies for prevention, and developing new approaches for detection and treatment.

PROMOTING RESEARCH TRAINING AND EDUCATION

AECA has effectively facilitated research training delivered through high-quality, multidisciplinary professional courses designed to enhance knowledge and skills. Primary areas of international education exchange include urologic and gynecologic oncology, hematology, radiation oncology, pathology, immunotherapy, cancer prevention, palliative care, and pediatric cancers.

TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO POLICY AND PROGRAMS

AECA, together with international partners, leads cancer control activities in Eurasia by providing guidance on existing practices to inform policy and strengthen research capacity, stimulate partnerships, and contribute to successful implementation of cancer control plans. AECA's active engagement in Eurasia has and continues to ensure that research results are translated into policies and programs that help all people live longer and healthier lives.