

Dear Janani Krishnaswamy
Commissioning Editor, Government Gazette

It was with great pleasure and enthusiasm that, on behalf of the Portuguese Society of Gastroenterology, I have participated in the Pancreatic Cancer Europe Roundtable 2019, promoted by the International Centre for Parliamentary Studies (ICPS), held in Brussels, on the past 9th of July.

The roundtable, superiorly chaired by Dr. Francesco Sclafani, was a very participated one, with all the delegates having the opportunity to give their opinions and inputs in all proposed topics for debate, namely analyzing the current policy framework of Pancreatic Cancer in the EU and member states; improving prevention, diagnosis and patient treatment; and fostering research, innovation and drugs development. At the end, recommendations were proposed contemplating these various issues.

I myself, as a clinician who deals everyday with pancreatic cancer patients, not only in the moment of the diagnosis and staging of the disease, but also in the management of late stage symptoms, alleviating pain and pruritis, have focused my strong recommendations in the premalignant phase of this dismal disease. In fact, it is with concern that we testify the increasing incidence of pancreatic cancer, that is not being accompanied by a desired increased rhythm in the knowledge of its biology, early diagnosis and effective treatment. For this reason, it is not with surprise that pancreatic cancer is expected to be the second cause of cancer related deaths by 2020.

In our opinion, it is not enough to diagnose and treat the disease in its earlier stages, as the survival rates, even in these patients, are far from being reasonable. Strong efforts should be made to detect the disease before it appears. In other words, awareness campaigns should take place, not only for the general population but also for the medical community itself, to alert for the existence of high-risk groups of individuals that should be identified and properly orientated. Belonging to this group are those with family history of pancreatic cancer or harboring a genetic hereditary syndrome predisposing for its occurrence (e.g. Peutz-Jeghers syndrome, hereditary pancreatitis, Lynch Syndrome, etc) those with pancreatic mucinous cystic lesions, those suffering from chronic pancreatitis, and, more recently recognized, patients developing new onset (>36months) diabetes after the age of 50y.

Besides the recognition of this population at increased risk for developing pancreatic cancer, it is extremely important to try to stratify these subjects in order to identify those who will really benefit from a tight surveillance strategy. This objective, in our opinion, can only be achieved if a "magic" biomarker (or a panel of biomarkers) could be validated for selecting patients or healthy individuals, harboring a condition with high risk of progression to cancer, but that could be recognized in a "safe" premalignant phase. Posteriorly, these subgroup of selected "very high"-risk patients should be screened and surveilled properly, and, when indicated, treated effectively before cancer development. Having said so, it is our pure desire that research on this matter could be encouraged and be a primordial target for financial funding, at a national and international levels.

Other secondary, but also very relevant, topics to be considered in the recommendation aims are: prevention campaigns, namely alerting for the importance of tobacco smoking as the most important risk factor for the development of pancreatic cancer; facilitation the access of newly diagnosed or high risk patients to a network of centers of reference in this pathology; the need to have well-structured multidisciplinary teams (MDT), with high

qualified and dedicated professionals; the need to contemplate in these MDT aspects related to nutrition and psychological support, since from the beginning of patient management; Constant lobbying, at various levels, for funding research from biology to cure; Stimulate data collection, data sharing and collaborative studies all over the world.

Finally, personally and in the name of the Portuguese Society of Gastroenterology, we do want to thank and emphasize the value this kind initiatives held by of ICPS and look forward to contributing in upcoming ones.

Pancreatic cancer patients deserve our continuous hope and efforts!

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