Access to Specialized Pediatric Cancer Care in Switzerland

Martin Adam, MSc, Nicolas von der Weid, MD, Gisela Michel, PhD, Marcel Zwahlen, PhD, Jean-Michel Lutz, PhD, Nicole Probst-Hensch, PhD, Felix Niggli, MD, and Claudia Kuehni, MD*

for the Swiss Pediatric Oncology Group (SPOG) and for the Swiss Association of Cancer Registries (ASRT)

INTRODUCTION

Specialized pediatric oncology care is thought to be essential to guarantee state-of-the-art treatment and hence maximal cure rates and minimal late effects for childhood and adolescent cancer patients [1,2]. The guidelines for pediatric cancer centers (PCCs) from the American Academy of Pediatrics emphasize the importance of specialized care in tertiary care pediatric centers with essential facilities, capabilities, and personnel, including board-certified pediatric hematologists–oncologists, qualified pediatric subspecialty consultants, pediatric surgical specialists, and pediatric oncology nurses [1,2]. There are several reasons for this: (i) cancers in children are rare, differ from those in adults [3], and treatment protocols should be age-adapted; (ii) PCCs include more patients in clinical cancer trials than other hospitals [4]; (iii) some studies suggested that adolescents treated on pediatric protocols might have better survival rates than those on adult protocols [5,6]; and (iv) site of care and provider specialty might also matter [7].

In Switzerland, specialized oncology care and clinical cancer research in pediatrics are provided by the Swiss Pediatric Oncology Group (SPOG; www.spo.ch). The nine SPOG PCCs are led by board-certified pediatric oncologists/hematologists, have access to state-of-the-art multicenter clinical studies and can guarantee adequate insurance coverage. All patients treated in a PCC are routinely registered in the Swiss Childhood Cancer Registry (SCCR) [8,9]. In parallel, 14 of the 26 Swiss cantons (cantons in Switzerland play a similar political role as the states in the USA)...

Conflict of interest: nothing to declare.

1Dr. med. R. Angst, Aarau; Prof. Dr. med. M. Paulussen, V. Stabel, Basel; Prof. Dr. med. A. H. Frick, A.-M. Probst, Dr. A. Kofler, Zurich.
2Prof. Dr. G. Jundt, Basel City & Land; Dr. J.-M. Lutz, Prof. Dr. C. Bouchardy, P. Purv, G. Fioretta, M. Usel, Geneva; Dr. H. Frick, A.-M. Abutillo, Grisons & Glarus; Prof. Dr. F. Levi, Neuchatel.
3Dr. med. R. Angst, Aarau; Prof. Dr. med. M. Paulussen, V. Stabel, Basel; Prof. Dr. med. A. H. Frick, A.-M. Probst, Dr. A. Kofler, Zurich.
4Prof. Dr. G. Jundt, Basel City & Land; Dr. J.-M. Lutz, Prof. Dr. C. Bouchardy, P. Purv, G. Fioretta, M. Usel, Geneva; Dr. H. Frick, A.-M. Abutillo, Grisons & Glarus; Prof. Dr. F. Levi, Neuchatel.
5National Institute for Cancer Epidemiology and Registration; PCC, pediatric cancer center; SCCR, Swiss Childhood Cancer Registry; SFSO, Swiss Federal Statistical Office; SPOG, Swiss Pediatric Oncology Group; 95% CI, 95% confidence interval.