ADVANCING EARLY CHILDHOOD CANCER DIAGNOSIS IN BENIN : A GFAOP INITIATIVE

BOGNON G [1,2], DIEYE F L [2], MASSI R [3], KINDJINOU M [4], HESSISSEN L[2], SAGBO G G [1,2]

1- Pediatric Oncology Unit (UOP), University Hospital Center (CHUDOP), Porto-Novo, Benin 2- Franco-African Pediatric Oncology Group (GFAOP), Villejuif, France
3- Hematology Unit of the University Hospital Center (CHUDOP), Porto-Novo, Benin 4- Ophthalmology Department of the University Hospital Center (CHUDOP), Porto-Novo, Benin

Introduction

Childhood cancer poses a significant mortality risk in many lw- and middle-income countries, including Benin, mainly due to late-stage diagnoses. To address this challenge, Franco-African Pediatric Oncology Group (GFAOP) initiated an early diagnosis program, initially supported by the BMS Foundation and later by the S Foundation. This study assesses the program's implementation in Benin, focusing on healthcare provider capacity building and community awareness from 2019 to 2023.

Methodology

GFAOP's early childhood cancer diagnosis activities in Benin, spanning from 2019 to 2023, aimed to strengthen healthcare provider skills and enhance community awareness. Target groups included healthcare professionals (specialist and non-specialist doctors, nurses, and midwives) and the community (parents, traditional healers, religious leaders, women's groups). Health personnel activities covered childhood cancer awareness, early signs training, and referral procedures. Community-related activities focused on raising awareness about signs prompting early consultation. Educational modules developed by GFAOP's pediatric oncology experts were used to train trainers and cascade knowledge to healthcare providers. Early diagnosis was defined as a delay of less than one month between the appearance of the first sign and confirmation of the diagnosis

Results

Health professional training occurred across all twelve departments of Benin, with 30 initial trainers, including 24 pediatricians and 6 general practitioners, subsequently training 374 healthcare providers. WhatsApp groups facilitated ongoing digital training, while community awareness targeted traditional healers, religious leaders, women's associations, and parents through in-person campaigns and local media broadcasts. Early diagnosis activities significantly increased referrals (from 22 in 2018 to 121 in 2023), achieving a transition from almost no early diagnosis to 44.3% in 2023.
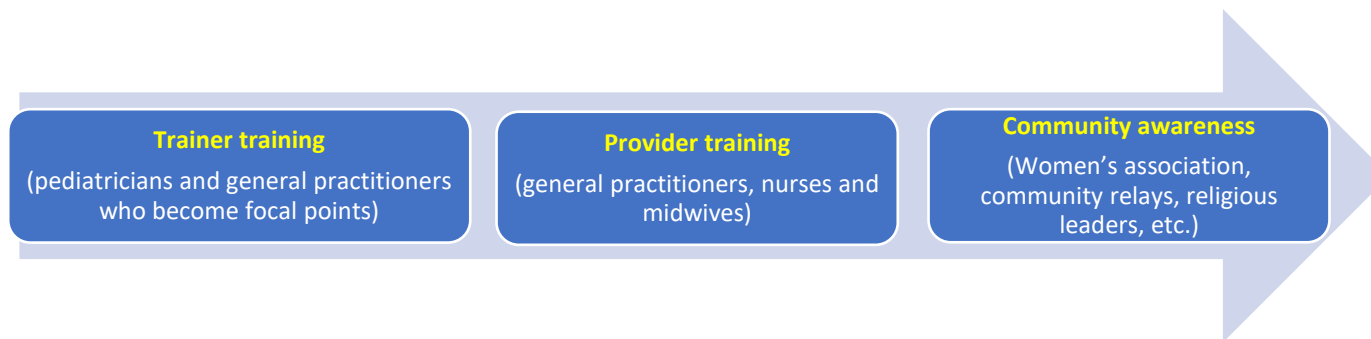
Trainer training
(pediatricians and general practitioners who become focal points)

Provider training
(general practitioners, nurses and midwives)

Community awareness
(Women's association, community relays, religious leaders, etc.)

Figure: process of improving early diagnosis in Benin

Conclusion

GFAOP's early diagnosis program successfully improved referral rates, achieving a 44.3% early diagnosis rate. Continued and reinforced efforts are essential to meet GFAOP and WHO goals by 2030.