IMPLEMENTATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CANCER DIAGNOSIS ACTIVITIES IN BENIN SUPPORTED BY THE FRANCO-AFRICAN GROUP OF PEDIATRIC ONCOLOGY (GFAOP)

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 has a high mortality rate in low- and middle-income countries, like Benin, due to late diagnosis. To reduce the number of patients presenting at advanced stages, GFAOP implemented 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 from 2019 to 2023, focusing on healthcare workers' training and community awareness.

Methodology

GFAOP's activities, from 2019 to 2023, aimed at strengthening healthcare workers' skills and raising community awareness. Two target groups were identified: healthcare workers (specialists, general practitioners, nurses, and midwives) and the community (parents, traditional healers, religious leaders, and women's groups). Healthcare workers' activities focused on raising awareness of childhood cancer and training on early signs and the referral processes. Community activities focused on educating the public about signs that require early consultation. Educational modules designed by GFAOP experts were used to train trainers, who then educated healthcare workers.

Results

Training took place across all twelve departments of Benin. Initially, 30 trainers, including 24 pediatricians and 6 general practitioners, were trained. These trainers then trained 374 healthcare workers. WhatsApp discussion groups were set up for ongoing communication. Community awareness activities included in-person sessions, audiovisual materials, and broadcasts on local media. As a result, referral rates improved significantly (22 in 2018 to 121 in 2023), and the early diagnosis rate increased from nearly zero to 17.7% in 2022 and 44.3% in 2023.

Conclusion

The GFAOP early diagnosis program improved referral processes and achieved a 44.3% early diagnosis rate. However, continuous and reinforced efforts are needed to meet GFAOP and WHO objectives by 2030, especially, as Benin has been designated a pilot site for the program's implementation.

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