# ASCO & WHO to Collaborate on Quality Indicators for Cancer Facilities

The collaboration will address disparities in cancer care in high-income and lower-income countries.

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In a collaboration announced today, the American Society of Clinical Oncology, Inc.(ASCO) will work with the World Health Organization (WHO) to measure and improve the quality of cancer care internationally. The goal is to achieve health-related targets of the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals and WHO Global Action Plan on Non-Communicable Diseases and help cancer professionals provide the best possible care to their patients.

The collaboration, formalized through a joint Memorandum of Understanding, is being unveiled by WHO Cancer Control Officer André Ilbawi, MD, in his keynote address at the 2022 ASCO Annual Meeting, held June 3–7 in Chicago. Dr. Ilbawi, a surgical oncologist, is speaking about the divergence of cancer control over the past decade, with high-income countries achieving improved survival and increased innovation while lower-income countries face hardships and inaccessible care, and the ways we can address this growing gap.

“In seeking quality cancer care worldwide, the goals of ASCO and the WHO are fully aligned,” said ASCO President Everett E. Vokes, MD, FASCO. “Building on years of informal collaboration with the WHO, we now look forward to working with our WHO colleagues and stakeholders to advance international quality programs for cancer care—one of ASCO’s strategic focus areas. I strongly believe that achieving equity for patients across the spectrum of diagnosis, care, and survivorship begins with connecting the oncology community worldwide, and this collaboration is a major step toward that goal.”

WHO, through its Department for Noncommunicable Diseases, is working with member states to strengthen their cancer control programs, including through WHO global cancer initiatives in breast, cervical, and childhood cancers. WHO is disseminating information, best practices, and innovative strategies on cancer control and leading an initiative to ensure that an additional three billion people worldwide get universal health coverage, are protected from health emergencies, or achieve better health and wellbeing using evidence-based policies and programs.

“Despite advances in cancer care in the last two decades, inequalities between and within countries are staggering and progressively increasing,” said WHO Cancer Control Officer André

Ilbawi, MD. “The experience of someone affected by cancer is profoundly determined by where they live and their socio-economic status. The partnership between WHO and ASCO catalyzes meaningful innovation to address these persistent inequities–locally and globally–in cancer care. Our partnership brings together ASCO’s 45,000 members—one-third of whom practice outside of the U.S.—and WHO’s offices in more than 150 countries to improve the quality of cancer care by providing direct support to governments and hospitals – particularly those in low- and middle-income countries – and incentivizing organizational and social innovations.”

The initial two projects on which ASCO and WHO will collaborate involve improving the quality of care for patients with cancer. Together, they will develop a coordinated approach to support WHO member states and cancer centers with improved access to quality care by linking facility-level quality improvement activities with national strategies.

“By leveraging one another’s resources and establishing networks and quality tools, we can amplify what we’re able to do toward providing high-quality care to more patients with cancer around the globe,” said ASCO Chief Medical Officer Julie R. Gralow, MD, FACP, FASCO.

The first project involves developing quality indicators for in-patient and out-patient cancer care facilities, focusing on breast cancer and palliative care. Drawing on ASCO’s Quality Oncology Practice Initiative (QOPI), a quality measurement program currently in use in 37 countries, and incorporating other potential data, inputs from experts, and WHO tools, ASCO and the WHO will create evidence-based quality indicators that can be used to assess the quality of a facility’s care. The goal is to develop and get expert feedback on the draft indicators this year and begin implementing them in select pilot countries in 2023, publishing a summary of initial key findings in 2024.

The second project entails ASCO and WHO gathering and sharing best practices with an aim to advance innovation in improving quality of care. The two organizations will draw on and synthesize key insights from stakeholders in their respective networks, including care providers, researchers, patients, and governmental authorities, as well as the scientific literature and other sources. This information will be compiled and published as case studies and an overall report expected to be published in 2023.

QOPI is a quality program designed for outpatient-oncology practices to foster a culture of self-examination and improvement. Participating practices can report on evidence-based quality measures and receive individual performance scores by practice, site, and provider, as well as benchmarked scores aggregated from all participating practices. Practices can use this performance data to identify, develop and implement quality improvement initiatives leading to better care and better outcomes for their patients.

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