

International Collaboration on Palliative Care Development Between ASCO and the Land of Hornbills

Yin Yee Wong, MBBS¹; Aaron Zi Jian Chiew, MD¹; Vanessa Eaton, MIM²; Frank D. Ferris, MD^{3,2}; Megan Kremzier, MPH²; Boon Leong Lim, MBBS⁴; Winnie Hui Yee Ling, MBBS^{5,6}; Asri Said, MBBS^{7,8}; Vanessa Sarchet, MIHMEP²; Tung Hui Tiong, MBBS^{9,10}; Pei Jye Voon, MD, MMed¹; and Yoke Ling Choo, MD¹

PURPOSE Palliative care in Sarawak is mainly provided by health care professionals with limited formal training in palliative care. Therefore, in 2020, collaborative work between Sarawak General Hospital, University Malaysia Sarawak, and ASCO began. This study reports on the outcome of this collaboration.

METHODS The collaboration was initiated with the first ASCO Palliative Care e-course, Train the Trainer program, International Development and Education Award—Palliative Care and translation of ASCO Palliative Care Interdisciplinary Curriculum resources.

RESULTS This collaboration has resulted in the change of practice of palliative care among the oncology team of Sarawak General Hospital.

CONCLUSION It encourages more timely palliative care referrals to ensure that patients with complex physical, psychosocial, and spiritual needs have the necessary input and support from the palliative care team throughout the course of patients' illnesses.

JCO Global Oncol 9:e2200351. © 2023 by American Society of Clinical Oncology

Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License 

INTRODUCTION

Sarawak, nicknamed the Land of Hornbills, located on northwest Borneo Island is the largest and fourth most populated state of Malaysia. It spans across 120,000 square kilometers hosting 2.9 million population.¹ As of 2010, 54% of the population is urban while 46% are residing in rural areas.² Given its widespread geographical area, Sarawak has the most dispersed rural communities in Malaysia.² Despite the progressive development of infrastructure in Sarawak, inadequate connectivity in the rural area with consequential accessibility issues especially for health care service remains a major challenge in the state.

Challenges in providing palliative care in Sarawak are many and include lack of trained personnel, lack of awareness and buy-ins on palliative care service, financial constraints, geographical challenge, and limited access to health care service in rural areas. To our knowledge, to date, there is only one palliative care physician in the state of Sarawak since mid-2021. Therefore, palliative care services are often provided by doctors and nurses who are passionate in palliative care, many with limited formal training in palliative care.

Sarawak General Hospital (SGH) is a tertiary public hospital and the only oncology center in the state which also serves as a teaching hospital for University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). Palliative care service in SGH has

been uniquely initiated and developed under the leadership of the oncology unit. The services provided include a nine-bedded inpatient ward, intrahospital and inter-hospital consult services, outpatient palliative care clinic, and combined multidisciplinary motor neuron disease outpatient clinic.

In addition, there are several independent, nonprofit organizations, namely National Cancer Society (Sarawak Branch), Two Tree Lodge Hospice and Kuching Life Care Society providing support and palliative care services in the community. The close-knitted collaboration between hospital-hospices enables patients who live within a 20-km radius to have seamless transition into the community, back to the comfort of their home and vice versa when needed.

ASCO International Cancer Corps (ICC) was first introduced to the oncology SGH team by Malaysian Oncological Society in 2019. ICC is designed to improve the quality of cancer care of medical institutions in low- and middle-income countries, addressing three primary areas of need namely, multidisciplinary management of common cancers, integration of palliative care into cancer care, and improvement of quality of care using evidence-based quality measures.

In 2020, collaborative work between SGH, UNIMAS, and ASCO began with the signing of Memorandum of

Author affiliations and support information (if applicable) appear at the end of this article.

Accepted on November 30, 2022 and published at ascopubs.org/journal-go on January 11, 2023; DOI <https://doi.org/10.1200/GO.22.00351>