

Topic Overview

Advancing the Development of National Childhood Cancer-care Strategies in Latin America

Stakeholder Dialogue

8 June 2015

The McMaster Health Forum, in partnership with the Union for International Cancer Control*, convened a stakeholder dialogue on the subject of advancing the development of national childhood cancer-care strategies in Latin America. The dialogue brought together 24 participants – two policymakers, one manager, six healthcare professionals, six researchers, and nine stakeholders -- from across Latin America as well as from Canada, the United States and several global health organizations to examine the problem, options for addressing it, and key implementation considerations.

Deliberation about the problem

Dialogue participants agreed that the nature of the problem can be understood in relation to the four themes presented in the evidence brief: 1) Latin America faces a heavy (but inconsistently measured) burden of childhood cancer morbidity and mortality; 2) access to childhood cancer care is inconsistent and limited, with significant differences in outcomes within and between countries; 3) there is a need for more coordinated system-wide practices and policies to strengthen childhood cancer control in Latin America as part of broader efforts to improve child health and strengthen health systems; and 4) childhood cancer receives limited attention from policymakers despite its importance for reducing childhood mortality and improving health over the life course. In relation to these dimensions of the problem, participants focused on three overarching themes: 1) limited context-specific and comparative evidence constrains policy and program development; 2) the gap between knowing what policy responses are needed and implementing them; and 3) lack of awareness of childhood cancer as a pressing health-system issue has limited both the scope and effectiveness of collective action at national, regional and international levels.



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Participants drawn from government and from health, professional and research organizations gather during a McMaster Health Forum event on 8 June 2015

Deliberation about an approach

Deliberations about the three elements of a potentially comprehensive approach to address the problem centred on whether a pan-regional task force to develop and oversee the implementation of national childhood cancer strategies in Latin America is needed, as well as what form it would take and the activities it could perform. While some participants initially questioned whether such a task force would be a worthwhile use of time and resources given the need for country-level action, all participants eventually agreed that there is a need for a pan-regional task force given that it would support collective action toward addressing shared issues (e.g., building cancer registries and enhancing access to diagnosis, medicines and allied treatment) and individual efforts at the national level, which would continue to be the main locus of action. Participants also emphasized that essential components for a pan-regional task force include developing a coherent statement of purpose, clearly articulated foundational values (e.g., focusing on children and families with a corollary emphasis on human rights), and strong governance. Deliberations about the second (developing health-system guidance) and third (building capacity for monitoring and evaluation) elements emphasized their intertwined nature. Most participants viewed them as related components of an iterative process, to be pursued in tandem and to inform one another. Ultimately, participants endorsed the utility of a framework to guide evidence synthesis and data collection, as well as to develop health-system guidance.

Deliberation about next steps

Four priorities for action emerged from participants during the deliberations about next steps that could be taken by different constituencies. These included: 1) building advocacy efforts for strengthening national childhood cancer care; 2) generating data and evidence; 3) fostering stakeholder engagement; and 4) building a pan-regional task force. Participants framed these next steps as complementary initiatives that should be pursued in tandem. Specific activities cited as interdependent included: linking all elements of a solution (i.e., task force activities, health-system guidance, monitoring and evaluation) to advocacy strategies; developing a matrix of childhood cancer system development to guide knowledge creation and assist with advocacy efforts; and the need to augment the involvement of key stakeholders in priority next steps, most notably task force planning and execution.

Dialogue deliverables

To learn more about this topic, consult the [evidence brief](#) that was presented to participants before the dialogue, the [summary](#) of the dialogue, and view or listen to the [interviews](#) with dialogue participants. For an electronic copy of the evidence brief or dialogue summary, or to view or listen to the interviews, visit our website www.mcmasterhealthforum.com and click on 'Products' along the sidebar, or for direct access to our YouTube channel, simply click on the icons below.