SIOG 2014: Bringing two worlds together: oncology and geriatrics...

In October 2014, the 14th Conference of the International Society of Geriatric Oncology (SIOG) was held in Lisbon, Portugal, celebrating SIOG’s mission by bringing together multidisciplinary experts in both oncology and geriatric medicine. More than 350 healthcare workers from all over the world participated, not only physicians but also a growing amount of nurses and allied healthcare workers with a special interest in the care for older persons with cancer.

This year’s conference intended to bridge the gap of best practices between oncology and geriatric medicine featuring multidisciplinary sessions divided in 5 different tracks: solid tumors; hematologic malignancies; new therapies and basic science; nursing, supportive care & geriatric assessment; advocacy and socio-economic issues.

Increasing life expectancy in the general population and the fact that a disproportional burden of cancer occurs in people age 65 years and older, have generated great interest in delivering better cancer care for older persons in the past decades. The recently published SIOG guideline on geriatric assessment (GA) recommends that all patients with cancer age 70 years and older undergo some form of geriatric assessment (GA) which provides a global view on the general health status taking age-related aspects into account (eg. functionality, cognitive status, nutritional status, ..). It is not surprising that GA and GA-related topics, are an important topic on the annual conference, specifically interesting for nurses and allied healthcare workers who often are dedicated to implement GA in daily oncology practice.

In the past years the interest of SIOG has grown to focus on the role of nurses and allied health workers within the care of older patients with cancer. This resulted in the development of the SIOG Nursing & Allied Health Working Group in 2014 which is nominated to develop and promote excellence in geriatric oncology nursing & allied health through the SIOG strategic directions: education/clinical practice; research;
advocacy. For the annual conference, special interest sessions were created: geriatric syndromes in oncology and international geriatric oncology models of care. The importance was also highlighted by the large number of abstracts submitted in the nursing, supportive care & geriatric assessment track resulting in 56 poster presentations giving an update of the current state of the art.

To further promote the interest and the work in the field of geriatric oncology, the SIOG Nursing & Allied Health Investigators Award was developed which is presented to nurses or allied health workers whose work contributes significantly to the care of older persons with cancer. Three speakers were selected to present their work on this year’s annual conference: Heidi Yulico, a Geriatric Nurse Practitioner in the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center of New York (topic: multidisciplinary educational course for oncology nurses); Ginah Nightingale, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice of the Jefferson School of Pharmacy, University of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (USA) (topic: pharmacist-led medication program) and Cindy Kenis, geriatric oncology nurse in the University Hospitals of Leuven, Belgium (topic: prognostic value of GA for overall survival). The first SIOG Nursing & Allied Health Investigators Award winner was the third speaker: Cindy Kenis.

In general, the 14th SIOG conference was a great success bringing together excellent speakers and topics related to the care for older persons with cancer. One of the main goals of the SIOG conference stays the establishment a worldwide platform with the ultimate goal improving care for older persons with cancer. All interested physicians, nurses or other healthcare workers are very welcome at the 15th SIOG conference in Prague, Czech Republic, November 12-14 in 2015.