

Radiotherapy resources for the care of head and neck patients in Italy. A survey by the head and neck group of the Italian Association for Radiation Oncology (AIRO)

Paolo Frata¹, Pietro Ponticelli², Dorian Cosentino³, Alberto Buffoli⁴, Angelo Di Pilla⁵, Brunello Morrica⁶, and Mauro Palazzi⁷

¹Department of Radiation Oncology, Istituto del Radio "O. Alberti", Brescia University Hospital, Brescia; ²Unit of Radiotherapy, Ospedale S. Donato, Arezzo; ³Unit of Radiotherapy, Ospedale Sant'Anna, Como; ⁴Unit of Oncological Radiotherapy, Ospedale S. Maria della Misericordia, Udine; ⁵Unit of Radiotherapy, Ospedale Clinicizzato SS. Annunziata, Chieti; ⁶Unit of Radiotherapy, Istituto Nazionale Tumori "G. Pascale", Napoli; ⁷Unit of Radiotherapy, Fondazione IRCCS Istituto Nazionale dei Tumori, Milan, Italy

ABSTRACT

Aims and background. In 2006 a survey was performed to define the resources available in Italy for the provision of radiotherapy services to head and neck cancer patients. This was the first initiative of the newly founded Head and Neck Group of the Italian Association for Radiation Oncology.

Methods. A questionnaire was sent to all 138 radiotherapy centers active in the country. Items investigated included total numbers of head and neck cancer patients treated per year, waiting time before the start of treatment, general technical issues, and integration with surgery and chemotherapy.

Results. Sixty-nine questionnaires were returned (50% response rate). The total number of patients treated was 4,670, averaging 68 cases per center. The larynx was the primary site most frequently involved. Average waiting time was 30 days and 47 days for nonresected and postoperative cases, respectively. The combination of chemotherapy and radiotherapy was delivered to nonresected and resected patients in 96% and 54% of centers, respectively. Survey response rates, waiting time, and the use of organ preservation protocols were the issues showing more variations across the country.

Conclusions. This survey provides important data on radiotherapy resources available for head and neck cancer patients in Italy. The evidence of significant differences across the country concerning several relevant issues and the potential for cooperative clinical efforts in this relatively rare group of diseases urge the Group to plan further initiatives.

Key words: head and neck cancer, Italy, radiotherapy, resources, survey.

Correspondence to: Prof Paolo Frata, Cattedra di Radioterapia Università degli Studi di Brescia, Istituto del Radio "O. Alberti" Spedali Civili di Brescia, Piazzale Spedali Civili 1, 25123 Brescia, Italy.
Tel +39-030-3995271;
fax +39-030-396700;
e-mail frata@med.unibs.it

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