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IAEA Mission Assesses Mexico's Cancer Control Capacities and Helps Identify Priorities



Francisca Redondo, diagnosis and nuclear medicine expert (right), in discussion with Gilberto Medina Escobedo from the Pathology Department of the Lic. Ignacio Garcia Tellez De Merida Hospital in Yucatán, Mexico. (Photo: A. Benedicto/IAEA)

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— Abelardo Meneses Garcia, Director General of INCan

Mexico's health system would benefit from a comprehensive cancer control plan to address countrywide needs, and a steering committee composed of key cancer control stakeholders to develop and support its implementation.

This was a key finding from an imPACT Review in September, which brought together a team of international experts from the IAEA, the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the Union for International Cancer Control.

The Review assessed Mexico's capacities and needs in cancer care and highlighted where services can be

strengthened. The experts visited public and private facilities within the main institutions in the national health system, including the Mexican Social Security Institute, the Institute for Social Security and Services for State Workers, and the Ministry of Health as well as academics and representatives of civil society.

“The recommendations will help us prioritize our activities and ultimately improve access to cancer care,” said Abelardo Meneses Garcia, Director General of the National Cancer Institute (INCan). “Although our health system is somewhat fragmented, improvements are being made in the delivery of health care, such as in the collection of cancer information through a population-based registry which was established a year ago.”

According to IARC, an estimated 190 000 Mexicans will develop cancer in 2018 with over 83 000 dying from the disease. These figures are expected to increase by 44 and 51 percent, respectively, by 2030. Mexico's most common causes of cancer deaths are prostate and lung in men and breast and cervical cancer in women.



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Alejandro Mohar Betancourt, INCan's Deputy Director, said: "The Mission's recommendations will ensure a technical continuity for our current strategic cancer control planning and will support future decision-making."

The team of experts reviewed all components of cancer control including planning, registration and surveillance, prevention and early detection, diagnostics, treatment and palliative care as well as radiation safety and security of radioactive sources in medical facilities and the role of civil society.

"The experts who join impACT Reviews are nominated by the IAEA and our partners. They provide the evidence and recommendations needed to assist the Ministry of Health and the National Cancer Institute to formulate next steps to address Mexico's cancer burden," said Luis Carlos Longoria, Director of the IAEA's Latin America and Caribbean Division in the Department of Technical Cooperation, who led the impACT mission. "These Reviews also highlight the areas where technical cooperation in cancer control can be provided by the IAEA to assist Member States with their most pressing needs and priorities."

Outcomes

The experts provided a number of additional recommendations for consideration. These included:

- Strengthen coordination among institutions in the national health system to improve cancer information and patient access to diagnosis and treatment services nationwide by enabling, among others, cancer care planning and collaboration among health providers at the State level.
- Increase the number of PET/CT, nuclear medicine and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) units and review their locations to improve nationwide access.
- Standardize audits of diagnostic services to meet the same levels of quality.
- Revise clinical treatment guidelines.
- Formulate a National Radiotherapy Development Plan, involving all institutions in the national health system.
- Prioritize training in medical physics and palliative care.
- Review the list of Essential Drugs and the Essential Package of Palliative Care as the minimum standard of access countrywide.
- Ensure diagnostic reference levels, dose constraints and patient release criteria for radiation safety.

"The Pan American Health Organization promotes comprehensive prevention and cancer control programmes," said Miguel Malo, PAHO/WHO's Non-Communicable Disease Officer in Mexico. "It is therefore important that the country has an analysis of its needs and can set priorities to fight this disease. These recommendations will help the country to strengthen planning and effective implementation of an integrated national cancer prevention and control plan."

The IAEA is currently providing support to strengthen skills in new radiotherapy and nuclear medicine techniques, and resources for radiotherapy and radiology through its technical cooperation programme.

The impACT mission to Mexico was the 93rd conducted by the IAEA since 2005.



Laura Suchil, Chief of the Department of Institutional Relations (left) and Alejandro Mohar, Deputy Director (centre), from the National Cancer Institute in discussion with Dafne Ruiz from the General Directorate of International Relations at INCan during the impACT mission in Mexico. (Photo: A. Benedicto/IAEA)

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