

Foreword

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is pleased to publish *Patterns of care for women with breast cancer in Morocco: an assessment of breast cancer diagnosis, management, and survival in two leading oncology centres* on the eve of the launch of the Global Breast Cancer Initiative by the World Health Organization (WHO). This publication summarizes the outcomes of a patterns-of-care study recently completed by IARC in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of the Kingdom of Morocco and the Lalla Salma Foundation for Cancer Prevention and Treatment.

Guided by a progressive National Plan for Cancer Prevention and Control formulated in 2010, the Moroccan Ministry of Health has made significant investments to implement a nationwide breast cancer screening programme and improve diagnostic and treatment facilities for breast cancer in the country. This patterns-of-care study was conducted at the two largest publicly funded oncology centres in Morocco: Centre Mohammed VI pour le traitement des cancers (CM-VI) in Casablanca and Institut National d'Oncologie Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah (INO) in Rabat, to assess how far state-of-the-art cancer diagnostics and

therapy have been disseminated into routine health care after the implementation of the new strategies.

This high-impact study involved more than 2000 patients with breast cancer who were registered at CM-VI and INO over a decade, from 2008 to 2017. It documented temporal variations in breast cancer characteristics, the level of improvement in access to cancer diagnosis and treatment over time, the variations in practices related to breast cancer treatment, and the time trend of disease-free survival for these patients. The study found a reduction in access delay over time, a significant improvement over time in the proportion of patients covered by state-sponsored health insurance, a lower prevalence of advanced-stage breast cancer compared with other countries in the region, a high proportion of patients with complete pathological staging and molecular profiling, and 5-year disease-free survival for early-stage breast cancer at INO that was comparable to that observed in high-resource countries.

These findings highlight the improvements in breast cancer care that occurred in Morocco as a result of pragmatic policies and systematic planning.

The study also documented several deficiencies in breast cancer care, to be addressed by the Moroccan Ministry of Health. Despite some improvement over time, the access delay was still unacceptably high. Prolonged intervals were observed between confirmation of diagnosis and initiation of treatment, and between surgery and initiation of adjuvant treatment. A high proportion of patients who were eligible for breast-conserving surgery underwent mastectomy. In addition, there were significant disparities in the quality of care between CM-VI and INO.

It is extremely important for such pragmatic studies to be implemented in every country, to enable more informed and realistic cancer control planning. We congratulate our collaborators in Morocco for having the foresight to implement this study, and thank them for involving IARC from the very beginning. This study is an excellent example of IARC's mission: cancer research that matters.

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for Research on Cancer