

## Key issues

# Reducing the skills gap



**One of the biggest obstacles we face today in delivering quality cancer care is the shortage of trained healthcare professionals.**

**Addressing the gap is the clearest way to achieving progress in reducing cancer.**

### The skills shortage

In many parts of the world and especially in remote and rural regions, there is a severe shortage of healthcare providers for cancer (especially oncologists and oncology nurses). In fact, some countries do not have clinical oncologists to provide care<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to a shortage of general oncologists, there is also a lack of specialist oncologists - for example - gynaecological oncologists with skills and experience in ovarian, cervical and vaginal cancers etc.,<sup>2</sup> and in paediatric oncology, where clinicians and nurses specialised for cancer care in children, are very limited in number.

As the number of cancer cases rise and the skills gap widens, this exerts pressure on healthcare workers and health systems, impacting on the quality of care for patients and further exacerbates the cancer health disparities that already exist.

### The skills gap

Inadequate education of healthcare providers is one of the most urgent issues in delivering and receiving quality cancer care<sup>3</sup>. To ensure accurate diagnosis and quality treatment, we must address the skills gap. One way to do this is by training healthcare providers across the entire cancer care continuum.

Also, healthcare providers can be trained to recognise the early signs and symptoms, understand appropriate early detection measures, ensure the safe and proper administration of cancer treatments and be able to deliver palliative care and pain and distress management.



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### What can we do?

- Advocate for more resources in training, thereby increasing the number of healthcare workers in oncology
- Address policies on strategies for retention of skilled healthcare workers
- **Healthcare workers** can support the development of locally adapted, culturally sensitive materials to improve knowledge transfer
- **Educators** can increase the use of mobile and online technology to complement traditional methods
- **Hospitals, clinics and governments** can where possible build on existing materials, training networks and infrastructure
- Engage traditionally non-cancer specialists such as community health workers, clinical health assistants, nurses and physicians in cancer care tasks (e.g. effective clinical breast exams, performing diagnostic tests).

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1. Mathew A (2018) Global Survey of Clinical Oncology Workforce <http://ascopubs.org/doi/pdf/10.1200/JGO.17.00188>

2. Cancer Research UK. Women's cancers. UK <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/womens-cancer>

3. Global Health Workforce Alliance (2013) A universal truth: no health without a workforce. Geneva: World Health Organization.