

EDITORIAL



ESMO Clinical Practice Guidelines: adapting and adopting new approaches for development, implementation and audit

The European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) Clinical Practice Guidelines (CPGs), which have been produced since 1999, enable oncologists to embark on evidence-based, state-of-the-art management of their patients. The CPGs are produced by renowned multidisciplinary experts from all over the world, are independently reviewed by peers and are regularly updated either in the form of a concise electronic short section updating the parent guideline (e-Update) or as a new, full CPG. Their uptake and popularity has increased exponentially over the last decade; currently, CPGs are being downloaded >2 million times annually.

In order to further build on their success, ESMO has reshaped them for better connection to the clinical reality that health care professionals face daily in oncology practice. The ESMO CPGs now contain flow charts on diagnosis and management, and every recommendation is accompanied by the level of evidence as well as two additional tool metrics developed by ESMO experts: the ESMO Magnitude of Clinical Benefit Score, which objectively quantifies the clinical benefit provided by an approved new therapy, and the ESMO Scale for Clinical Actionability of molecular Targets, which ranks molecularly aberrant drug pairs by their proven clinical utility.

Despite these advances, some important questions remain: How implementable are our guideline recommendations in real-life settings? Are they taken up and applied similarly in tertiary/academic centres and in district general hospital/community settings? What about other world areas? Approximately 35% of the ESMO CPG downloads originate from users in Asia, Africa and the Americas. Consequently, what is the impact of the scientific and regulatory realities in those parts of the world on the uptake and implementation of the ESMO CPGs? What can ESMO do to survey and tackle these issues?

The Pan-Asian Guideline Adaptation (PAGA) project was launched in 2017 jointly by ESMO and seven national oncology societies from China (Chinese Society of Clinical Oncology), India (Indian Society of Medical and Pediatric Oncology), Japan (Japanese Society of Medical Oncology), Korea (Korean Society of Medical Oncology), Malaysia (Malaysian Oncology Society), Singapore (Singapore Society of Oncology) and Taiwan (Taiwan Oncology Society), with a simple aim: to adapt the recommendations in

selected ESMO CPGs taking into consideration the particular scientific, practice and resource limitations of the individual national landscapes in the Asia Pacific region. Each year between two and four ESMO CPGs are adapted based on a remote voting process that culminates in a plenary session, involving ESMO experts, experts from the host Asian oncology society and two voting experts from each of the represented Asian oncology societies. Each adaptation is organised and coordinated by a host Asian oncology society, working closely with ESMO and inviting the experts from other Asia Pacific regions. The project was suspended in 2020 due to the coronavirus disease-2019 pandemic but was re-activated in 2021 with some methodological revisions: the Asian experts remotely vote on the ‘acceptability’ (focusing on science) and the ‘applicability’ (focusing on the approval, reimbursement and resource constraints of their individual countries) of each recommendation in an ESMO CPG, the plenary session being substituted by a virtual one, in a teleconference of up to 30 experts from ESMO and the Asia Pacific regions.

The need to connect and drive the project through and promote harmonious networking between the ESMO and Asian experts was so strong, that as for our ESMO guideline recommendations, we have had to adapt and adopt a digital, online forum for our scientific interactions. During 2021, PAGAs have been developed of the ESMO CPGs for early colon, renal, head and neck and prostate cancer. Moreover, during 2022 we will welcome the addition of the oncology societies of Thailand, Indonesia and Philippines in the PAGA project. ESMO, oncologists, other oncology specialists and patients are grateful to all experts and the participating and coordinating Asian oncology societies for this investment of time and energy during such stressful times.

We believe we can bring more novel ideas in guideline development and implementation. In 2021, ESMO launched monthly Real-World Case Guideline webinars with the participation of guideline authors and young and practicing oncologists. In addition to the educational intent, during the webinars we shall audit the uptake and implementability of our guidelines in the oncology community, so as to benchmark their impact on everyday practice and the improvement of patient outcomes. Moreover, carefully piloting collaborations of our ESMO CPGs with artificial intelligence-enabled decision-support systems may highlight additional avenues for guideline development and audit.

Due to its unlimited accessibility as a virtual scientific journal, ‘ESMO Open—Cancer Horizons’ has been chosen as

the ideal vehicle to transport these guidelines which are applicable not only in the academic setting, but also in everyday clinical practice in remote regions of the globe with limited access to information and exchange of ideas. Thus, ESMO's PAGA concept stands for the implementation of the ESMO vision to represent and enable oncologists all over the world to deliver the best possible care of cancer patients.

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