UIICC My Child Matters awards: 2006 winners

The International Union Against Cancer (UIICC) announced the 2006 recipients of its My Child Matters awards on Dec 15, 2006. 12 projects from Romania, Bolivia, Indonesia, Kenya, Mali, and Peru received up to €50 000 each, which will help to increase the dissemination of paediatric-cancer information to health-care professionals and the general public, and also improve early diagnosis and access to care.

"Cancer, and childhood cancer in particular, remains one of the great untackled health problems of low and middle-income nations", says Franco Cavalli, President of the UIICC who led the My Child Matters advisory steering committee. "In rich nations nearly 80% of children with cancer are cured, but in poor countries nearly 80% may die. However, relatively little money can help bring about important advances in cancer awareness, care, and support in these countries. Fortunately, these nations have [many] dedicated people with the right ideas to bring about change. These are the people to whom our awards go."

One such person is Adela Ratiu (Institute of Oncology ‘Prof Dr Alex Trestioreanu’, Bucharest, Romania) who hopes to use her funding to develop childhood cancer registries in Romania.

“Our problems are the unknown burden of childhood cancer as well as the low survival rate. There is a methodology of data collection but it is not compliant with the International Agency for Research on Cancer rules and there are no cancer registries. We hope to improve the current situation with this award”, she says. Ratiu’s team will develop registries in Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca in order to study the timelines of childhood cancer diagnosis, the efficiency of the referral system, and the availability of best standard treatments.

Bolivia has other problems, explains Yolanda Ernst (Oncology Institute of Eastern Bolivia, Santa Cruz de la Sierra), another recipient of the 2006 UIICC funding. “Children usually arrive at our institute with very advanced cancer. One of the reasons is that primary and secondary-care doctors have insufficient training in oncology for them to suspect cancer in children.” To help remedy the situation, Ernst’s team will run ongoing educational programmes in oncology for urban and rural physicians, training them to recognise cases of cancer in time for treatment to be more effective.

Nicholas Anthony Othieno Abinya (University of Nairobi, Kenya) wants to use his funding to reduce the mortality associated with Burkitt’s lymphoma in Kenya, by educating communities in affected areas about how to detect the disease and seek treatment early. “Data from the Kenya Medical Research Institute, Nairobi, show that Burkitt’s lymphoma is the most common single malignant entity found in childhood”, he explains. “We intend to educate people in the high-risk populations to recognise symptoms early, and to institute appropriate health-seeking measures. [We also want] to see if a preventable factor is identifiable.” The Kenya team hopes to trace patients from various hospitals. Their families will then be interviewed and environmental surveys done to pinpoint any such factors.

Across the Indian Ocean in Indonesia, Melissa Luwia (Vice President of the Social Services of the Indonesian Cancer Foundation, Jakarta) aims to increase community knowledge about leukaemia and retinoblastoma. Data from the Ciptomangunkusumo Hospital in Jakarta show a high mortality rate (50–60%) as a result of delays in diagnosis and treatment. “Parents are still not well informed about the importance of early detection and prompt treatment”, explains Luwia. “We plan to inform parents via focus group discussions, community events such as popular music performances, and radio talk shows. We also hope to increase the knowledge of health-care providers by organising training, printing educational materials, and arranging meetings for medical professionals.”

Other selected projects seek to offer everything from psychological and legal support for families of children with cancer, to purchase of computers and hiring teachers so that these children can learn more about their disease and communicate with others in the same situation.

“Some 80% of all children with cancer live in resource-constrained countries, and positive impacts on cancer awareness and cancer care could translate into thousands of children saved”, remarked Isabel Mortara, Executive Director of the UIICC (Geneva, Switzerland). “The results coming in from our 2005 award winners show that this is a reality. It is with enormous satisfaction that we present these awards and with enormous hope that they will continue to make a difference.”

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For information on the first wave of the UIICC’s fight against childhood cancer see Lancet Oncol 2006; 7:13–14.

Panel: Projects to receive funding

Indonesia
Integrated community-based leukaemia—Melissa Luwia
Early detection and prompt treatment of retinoblastoma—Rita Sitorus

Romania
Assessment of childhood cancer burden in Romania and ways of improvement—Adela Ratiu
Building a future for Romanian children—Rodica Cridland
Improvement of diagnostic services—Doina Mihaila

Kenya
Establishment of awareness of the occurrence of Burkitt’s lymphoma—Nicholas Anthony Othieno Abinya

Peru
Update in paediatric oncology in Peru—Gustavo Sarria Bardales
Development of attention capacities and the improvement of support services of “Albergue para Enfermos de cancer Señor de la Divina Misericordia”—Nelly Isabel Therese Huamani

Bolivia
Project to fight childhood cancer and improve paediatric oncological early diagnosis—Yolanda Ernst
Free leukaemia diagnosis for children—Ricardo Amaru Lucana
Learning to grow under special conditions—Lucia Parejas

Mali
Oncopaedia—Boubakar Togo