

A concise history of the Portuguese Institute of Oncology: A contribution to the history of Life Sciences

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ABSTRACT

This short communication is intended to be a contribution to the study of the history of the Portuguese Institute of Oncology (in Portugal known as IPO), and of its relevant role in the fight against cancer in Portugal. In this regard, I will highlight the name of Professor Dr. Francisco Gentil, as an emblematic name linked to the creation and development of IPO, as well as the Portuguese League Against Cancer (PLAC), as a fundraiser that has allowed the implementation of IPO projects.

Abbreviations: IPO: Portuguese Institute of Oncology; PLAC: Portuguese League Against Cancer; CROC: the Coimbra Regional Oncological Center; OROP: Oporto Regional Oncology Center; GHIPOFG: Grupo Hospitalar Instituto Português de Oncologia Francisco Gentil; EORTC: European Organization of Research and Treatment of Cancer

Introduction

In Portugal, the fight against cancer only began to have particular relevance in the second half of the 20th century, replacing tuberculosis as the main national disease. In fact, it was only in 1899 that the first Portuguese academic study appeared on the “Microbe of Carcinoma” by Dr. Câmara Pestana, which together with some research works on the cancer by Dr. Azevedo Neves and an international medical congress, in Lisbon, on the same theme, at the beginning of the 20th century, it came to bring some attention to this terrible disease.

Meanwhile, at the international level, in the first decades of the 20th century, particularly in Europe, the United States and Japan, the first anti-cancer treatment centers have begun to appear as a response to this worldwide public health problem. Within this context, the Portuguese Institute for the Study of Cancer which was later called the Portuguese Institute of Oncology (in Portugal known as IPO) was created by Professor Dr. Francisco Gentil [1]. Since its foundation, the methods of diagnosis, treatment and research have been at the forefront of the Portuguese fight against cancer. In this regard, it is fair to mention the philanthropic action of fundraisers

through national public petitions, namely the Portuguese League Against Cancer (PLAC), which from 1941 onwards, it has allowed the implementation of IPO projects, in its various medical valences and areas of knowledge about life sciences. In fact, PLAC has allowed the application of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity methods between the areas of life sciences and social sciences and humanities, with the aim of allowing a more effective oncological treatment and a better quality of life for cancer patients [2].

Methods

In this short communication, I have chosen the eight main works (articles, books) that from my point of view might allow the reader to have a concise but rigorous idea on the theme of history of the Portuguese Institute of Oncology (IPO).

Results and Discussion

The Portuguese Institute of Oncology (IPO) was created on 29th December 1923, under the responsibility of the Portuguese Ministry of Public Administration, until it came under the tutelage of the Ministry of Health, in 1987 [3]. After provisional headquarters at the

Hospital de Santa Marta, the Institute of Compulsory Social Insurance provided some financial funds that allowed the construction of the first definitive buildings on the grounds of Palhavã (Lisbon), with the inauguration of Pavilion A at the IPO, in 1927, which contained a Laboratory for medical research (currently is the Laboratory of Nuclear Medicine). In 1929, Pavilion B was inaugurated at the IPO, and it was initially intended for general and specialty consultations, although from 1960 onwards, it has started to host the Nursing Home and the Cytology Laboratory. In 1933, Pavilion C (known as the "Radio Pavilion") was inaugurated at the IPO that allowed X-Ray examinations and radiotherapy treatments to be carried out at the IPO [4], as well as the task assigned to administrative services. In the 1940s, several cycles of conferences were held in this Pavilion C, having as speakers, for example, Professors Dr. Henrique Parreira, Professors Dr. Marck Athias, Professors Dr. Bénard Guedes, among others, who contributed to the development and consolidation of the IPO.

In 1943, Pavilion D of the IPO was opened for oncological patients at an advanced stage of the disease and for palliative patients. In 1948, the hospital Operating Building (currently is the Central Pavilion) was inaugurated at the IPO, consisting of seven floors, namely, the ground floor (where consultations and blood samples have been carried out by physicians), the 1st floor (where laboratory tests have been performed by analysts), the 2nd floor (where surgeries have been performed by surgeons, and where pharmacy is located), and the upper floors (which are the rooms for hospitalization, as well as the support services, such as the kitchen, the library). In 1960, the 5th floor was assigned to pediatric oncology. In 1971, the Medicine Pavilion was inaugurated at the IPO, where hemotherapy and chemotherapy treatments are carried out at the IPO [5]. At last, I want to mention the role played by Professor Dr. Lima Basto, in the reorganization of the IPO, through the separation of the Clinical Department (containing radiotherapy, hemotherapy, surgical oncology, external consultations, home care, among others) and the Laboratory Department (containing nuclear medicine, hematology, among others).

Meanwhile, the large influx of oncological patients from various regions of Portugal to IPO, namely, the Center and North of the country, it led to the creation of regional cancer centers in order to allow cancer patients from these regions did not need to travel to Lisbon in order to have oncology medical care. Thus, after purchasing a villa in Coimbra, the Coimbra Regional Oncological Center (CROC) was created in 1962, with funds from PLAC and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation under the guidance of Professor Dr. Luís Raposo [6]. In 1977, the CROC has become independent from the IPO of Lisbon, having been modernized over time. In fact, from 1995 onwards, an exclusive consultation building was inaugurated at CROC, having been linked to the surgery and radiotherapy buildings of this medical establishment. Currently, the CROC provides a set of integrated cancer services that allow the diagnosis and conventional oncological treatments, namely

radiotherapy, chemotherapy, surgery, as well as a palliative care unit, and social services.

In 1974, the Oporto Regional Oncology Center (OROP) was created in the North of Portugal, through the donation of some land by João dos Santos Ferreira, as well as funds from PLAC and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, under the guidance of Professor Dr. José Guimarães dos Santos [7]. In 1977, through Decree Law N^o78/77, the OROP acquired administrative, technical and scientific autonomy from the IPO of Lisbon. In this regard, it is fair to mention the name of Professor Dr. José Cardoso da Silva for his contribution to the creation and development of the Clinical Oncology Department at OROP. Nowadays, the OROP has several oncological pavilions for diagnosis and treatments (external radiation and brachytherapy), consultations, laboratories, radiology and surgeries.

Conclusion

On 26th March 2014, through Decree Law no.76-B/2014, the three Portuguese oncological centers located in Lisbon, Coimbra and Oporto have become an integrated oncology group called «*Grupo Hospitalar Instituto Português de Oncologia Francisco Gentil*» (GHIPOFG) [8-11]. GHIPOFG has been a reference in the oncology area, both nationally and internationally, due to the constant improvements of scientific and technological methods (diagnosis, treatment, research, teaching) and human resources, having therefore become a member of the EORTC. At the same time, GHIPOFG has taken into attention to the psychological and social side of the cancer patient, and so it provides a home care service for patients who are unable to go to the hospital.

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