

The Optimal Nutritional Care for All International Conference – Sintra 2018

Eighteen Countries: Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Republic of Ireland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Austria, Poland Turkey and the UK.



“18 COUNTRIES, ONE VISION”

A world with optimal nutritional care for all

‘Every patient who is undernourished or at risk of undernutrition is systematically screened and has access to appropriate, equitable, high quality nutritional care’.



Anibal Marinho, Local Chairman

THE SILENT MAJORITY NEED TO BE LISTENED TO

Despite significant advances in medicine, malnutrition remains a public health problem with a high prevalence in patients and the elderly, especially in developed countries.

In Europe prevalence of cancer-related malnutrition ranges from 25% to 70%. Unfortunately, clinicians often do not diagnose malnutrition risk in cancer patients. Only 1 in 3 cancer patients at risk of malnutrition receive nutrition support.

It is incomprehensible that in the 21st century, there are patients who after treatment and are fully recovered, thanks

to the extraordinary advances of medical science and technology, now have a poor quality of life or are even dying due to undernourishment.

On the other hand, undernourishment is also prevalent among the elderly. 4.3% of community dwelling older adults are malnourished, while 25.4% are at risk of malnutrition. Moreover, in long-term care home residents, this prevalence can reach 85%.

Increasing life expectancy in developed world should be associated with a more active and healthy lifestyle, avoiding or at least delaying the physical, mental and economic dependence.

Overall, it is estimated that 115,000 outpatients, almost 1% of the Portuguese population, require nutritional support.

Fortunately, there are now nutritional supplements, prepared in laboratories, with all the necessary nutrients for a complete diet, even for patients with severe digestive disorders.

These supplements are affordable, but even so they are expensive for most of these low income patients. Unfortunately as these supplements are not funded, outpatients and the elderly are not making use of them.

Knowing all this, how many more people need to suffer for change to occur?



APNEP Direction Board



ONCA (Optimal Nutritional Care For All) International Conference

The fifth edition of this event took place on 12th and 13th November, at the Olga Cadaval Cultural Centre, in Sintra. Under the topic “Fair Access & Shared Decision Making: Key in Nutritional Care”, it was one of the most important encounters between some of the most relevant international and national voices in the field of Clinical Nutrition. “Perspetivas” was there and spoke to some of the protagonists.

The ONCA campaign is defined as a multi-stakeholder initiative that focuses on promoting the screening of the nutritional needs of European patients and the consequent strengthening of nutritional care in the several European countries. The Secretary General of the Coordinating body (the European Nutrition Health Alliance) is Frank de Man, PhD in Health Administration (University of Groningen). He spoke to Perspetivas, during the conference and he began by contextualizing the mission and the aim of the ONCA campaign.

He started by saying, “it may sound strange but, in the area of Healthcare, not enough attention is given to nutrition. We all know the importance of healthcare, which have this effect of improving the condition of the patient, but nutrition is also a vital component in improving the condition of the body so that it becomes stronger and more resistant. It turns out, however, that there

are many doctors and nurses who know little about nutrition, and this is a reality in every European country. “ ONCA has thus emerged as a reaction to this scenario and the individualized approach to the different nations (currently 18 countries are part of the initiative) is the direction that it wishes to follow in the near future.

Indeed, “Health issues and their financing in different European countries are dealt with at national level and therefore, if we are to change their practice, this is something that we should try not to do in Brussels but rather country by country”. Since 2011 this has been so, after an initial phase in which the focus was to generate influence at the level of the European Parliament.

The first steps in these efforts were, in particular, to screen the nutritional status of the citizens who were most vulnerable and, as a result, to provide them with adequate nutrition. For some this additional expenditure represents an

unnecessary expense but, in the words of our interviewee, “should not be seen as a cost but rather as an investment that actually reduces costs.” Reinforcing this point, Frank de Man tells us that “it is becoming increasingly well known that financial return is one of the most relevant effects of this effort, and we are very happy that a Portuguese MP who was present here said that same”. The Secretary-General offers the example of Swedish surgeon Olle Ljunqvist’s research (another of those present and also our interviewee), who “concludes that through improved nutrition and hydration prior to operations, the results become much better. The length of hospitalizations is shorter, there are fewer complications and, as a result, there are also cost savings for the Portuguese state.”

The aforementioned surgeon and academic also spoke with us about ONCA and this edition of the Conference. Following what was already explained by

Frank de Man, he refers to the initiative as “a platform that started with all kinds of stakeholders (namely patients, health professionals, health managers, insurance companies or the industry) and which has moved to the European Union. This happened a few years ago, at the time we obtained the support of the Commissioner, but we had difficulties over the years in getting the engagement of the political establishment, which would be important, since it is in the local sphere that care is undertaken”. More recently, the direction of efforts in this direction has produced more promising results, and this evolution will have had an important corollary in this fifth edition of ONCA: “What we saw today was a phenomenal breakthrough, as the Portuguese group demonstrated very clearly in the way it is involving local, government and MEPs in this issue. The Portuguese did a job that, in fact, was phenomenal and left all other countries with the great challenge of repeating the same”.





Frank de Man and Olle Ljunqvist



Anne de Looy and Pierre Singer



Rocco Barazzoni and Miguel León Sanz

Other important speakers followed these same words. Rocco Barazzoni, Secretary General of the European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism (ESPEN), highlighted how “this edition has brought an even greater focus on dissemination and awareness of the importance of Clinical Nutrition in treating patients and their outcomes. It was a very well organized event, especially in the way it put policymakers on the stage and created involvement with them.” Also Miguel León Sanz, President of the Spanish Society of Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism (SENPE), states that “the Portuguese organization has reason to be very proud.” He continues, reiterating the Portuguese success in the way it “attracted the attention of

the authorities in the area of Healthcare, which was one of the ideas behind the creation of ONCA. So far there have been three important links, which are patients, professionals and industry, the fourth will be the political players (particularly the ministries of health of the different countries) and if we want to move forward in this area, we will have to attract more and more decision-makers.

Two important names in the international scientific scene related to this subject are the Israeli academic Pierre Singer and the well-known British academic Anne de Looy.

The former states that “there were two very important aspects in this Conference: patient approach and nutrition as a

community. As for the first, the patient is the center of this whole issue, so it is imperative to know better and better what he feels and what his needs are. In that sense, I think the next steps for the future will most likely be focused on personalized medicine. Moreover, as regards the second point, there must also be communication with those responsible for decision-making and that was an important task for this meeting.”

Anne de Looy underlines “the frustration present in the Portuguese MPs and MEPs who have been here, who are very aware of these problems but who have many difficulties in achieving real progress. It is important to emphasize that nutrition problems are, in fact, a political issue. Given the amount of da-

ta and guidelines we can rely on, the question is about where is the will and the resources for us to carry this goal forward as a community.”

Asked precisely about the future of ONCA, the director, Frank de Man stated that the scenario seen so far is of “a growing interest.” In the near future, the expectation of “greater involvement by the members of the organization will be on the agenda, a probable increase in the number of participating countries” and the plans to “continue to hold events like this and to reinforce the presence of ONCA in social media (in the sense of sharing good practices and applying them in an educational sense) and by developing medical guidelines for different types of diseases”.

António Lacerda Sales



Basílio Horta



Maria do Céu Machado

