



Short communication

Italian Association of Cancer Nurses (AIIAO) is moving forward within a complex and fast-changing scenario: Our current agenda takes shape



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ABSTRACT

Cancer nursing is characterized by important challenges in the last years, widely highlighted during the debate within the professional association and the major cancer conferences in the last years. In this scenario, the professional associations play a pivotal role to embrace and spread the best practice, promoting the multi-disciplinary. For this reasons, Italian Association of Cancer Nurses (AIIAO) is re-thinking vision and strategies to best answer to the current challenges in cancer care. The aim of this paper is to provide information related to the upcoming AIIAO agenda, sharing reflections and discussing perspectives related to AIIAO choices related to its engagement in research, education and networking.

1. Introduction

Cancer nursing is characterized by important challenges in the last years, widely highlighted during the debate within the professional association and the major cancer conferences in the last five years [1–5]. Those challenges, often shared with all the community involved in the field of oncology care, are represented by many hot topics, such as the cancer epidemiology, the fast-changing treatments, the population aging, the patients' frailty, the advances in information technology, the issues related to some inequalities in primary care, and the gap between research findings and practice [5]. Moreover, the current scenario is also shaped by the fast-changing community demands (e.g., citizens are often more informed about treatments and different opportunities), and even by the economic climate that often push towards higher resources rationalization. All those aspects frame the need to re-think the organisations in order to strengthen the network aimed to support cancer patients, their relatives, and even the involved healthcare professionals, and even students [6–10]. In this fuzzy scenario, the professional associations play a pivotal role to embrace and spread the best practice, promoting the multidisciplinary, and being promoters to move the nursing competencies toward a dynamic definition in synergy with the universities and the healthcare facilities [10]. Therefore, sharing the agendas and the strategies of the nursing professional associations could represent a good approach to boost reflections amongst the scientific community, to facilitate the international comparison of ideas or issues, and even to strengthen the cancer nursing identity,

recognising the impact and potential of cancer nursing [6,12]. For this reason, the aim of this paper is to provide information related to the agenda of the 'Associazione Italiana Infermieri Di Area Oncologica' (AIIAO) (i.e., Italian Association of Cancer Nurses).

2. AIIAO: brief history, mission and values

AIIAO was founded on March 2012 by the union of three different former nurses' cancer association present in Italy. The birth of AIIAO was aimed to renew the purposes of the former associations, strengthening the possibility of networking, social engagement and the proactivity towards the needs of cancer patients. For this reason, AIIAO supports research projects, continuous education, and meetings at a regional and national level. AIIAO intends to have a voice on policy decision-making, representing cancer nurses and cancer patients' needs. AIIAO is also the national society which represents Italian cancer nurses at the European Oncology Nursing Society (EONS).

More specifically AIIAO pursues the following objectives: (a) to bring together in a unique association all the Italian nurses involved in the field of prevention, care, rehabilitation, palliation and complementary cancer care; (b) to incentive the development of advanced nursing practice in the cancer field, co-working with universities, facilities, associations and stakeholders; (c) to promote therapeutic education and communication as a fundamental element of the nurses' expertise, also to guarantee the individual and community's empowerment; (d) to contribute to the implementation of nursing research

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projects, developing new methodologies and strategies to answer to the current needs; (e) to promote sound relationships with institutions and organizations involved in the prevention, care and policy.

The 2017 AIIAO Congress held on June 2017 in Rome (University Campus Bio-Medico) represented a unique occasion to reach a mature agenda in the current field on cancer care. The 2017 AIIAO congress was aimed to boost reflection on the nursing impact on cancer care, and on the need to measure performance, and the nursing contribution on the achievement of outcomes amongst cancer patients. The AIIAO reflections are in harmony with the idea of Recognising European Cancer Nursing (RECaN), which is a major project strongly wanted by EONS and supported by the European Cancer Organisation (ECCO) [11]. The overall goal is to increase recognition of the value and contribution of oncology nursing across Europe, focusing on expert cancer nursing skills, research, education, clinical leadership, strategy and management roles, advocacy, and policy development [12]. According to EONS initiatives, AIIAO is firmly favourable to support the role of nursing in shaping onco-policy through participation, research, education and even through the spreading of our agenda to share how we are moving forward to be active within the debates of cancer world.

3. AIIAO agenda takes shape

AIIAO board members, shareholders' meeting, and members meeting, during 2017 AIIAO congress, matured the idea to re-think a different agenda than that one used in the first six years of life of the association. The reasons underpinning the shared idea of a renew of the agenda were related to a double consciousness: (a) the awareness the AIIAO maturity and recognition is grown in the last years, for this reason (b) it should be more present at the capillary level in the Italian territory, and more representative in Europe, even in supporting research and education to spread best practice, and to contribute in shaping policy.

The first chance related to the annual agenda is the decision to shift the national congress from an annual cadence to a biennial one. This decision represents the idea that AIIAO have to invest more energy to work close to the territory and the regional realities. The former annual national congress formula was very useful to achieve the current recognition of AIIAO, but it required a huge investment of energy that had somewhat penalized the work at a territory-regional level. For this reason, the biennial congress represents the will to best balance AIIAO energy to closely work with nurses and other association that could have common areas of interests with AIIAO, such as associations involved in vascular accesses management, ostomy care, or with some specific area of interest (e.g., onco-hematology, urology, gynaecology, perioperative care, wound care). Hence, the 2018 will be characterized by different seminars, workshop and integrated symposia with potential partners which share a common purpose with AIIAO. Those initiatives will be carried on in different Italian regions, and they will be also aimed to strengthen the networking among cancer nurses and between professions, association and patients representatives. Some initiative are already scheduled, many other are still in planning, acknowledging different local proposals to hold thematic study days that AIIAO received in the last months and that is currently receiving. At this regard, AIIAO invites the different stakeholders to work together and to be proactive towards AIIAO agenda (see <http://www.aiiao.it/>).

The second chance is related to the creation of a scientific committee to support the board in the scientific activity, due to AIIAO is willing to dedicate more energy in promoting research projects that could have a strong translational effect, then able to transfer research findings into practice. Currently, AIIAO chose to follow scientific areas mainly represented by (a) theory-driven researches, (b) studies which support Evidence Based Practice (EBP), and (c) innovative methods approach.

The choice to support theory-driven researches comes from the idea that there is nothing more practical than good theories to explain what

happens in the real world [13]. More precisely, clinicians have daily face with issue related to patients treatment adherence, patients' and families engagement or patients' understanding of their condition. Those factors are important predictor of better outcome as well as the adequacy of the treatment itself [13]. To deeply understand how we can face with those themes (e.g., adherence, engagement, self-care), researchers have to test theoretical frameworks that could potentially explain the reality, and that could address the pathways to support clinicians to face with the issue closely related to the social sciences. Testing theories is a challenge where nurses could represent the difference, because they work alongside cancer patients, and this characteristic of nursing is strategic when researchers have to formulate the hypothesis to test theories in order to answer to the current opened-questions related to the complexity of human beings who live a life beyond cancer. Moreover, some well-established theories (e.g., the job demands-resources model of burnout) [14] could help even to improve the health of professionals involved in the struggle against cancer, identifying peculiarities and possible suggestions to enhance the sensibility towards the theme of health amongst workers [15].

The studies which support EBP represent the historical soul of AIIAO. In fact, this research area is in continuity with the history of the researchers who worked actively in AIIAO bringing experiences during the meetings, conferences and even supporting researches (e.g., vascular access management). Other AIIAO areas of interest related to the EBP research are given by the studies on symptom management and nurse-led follow-up.

Furthermore, AIIAO wish to be active within the scenario of innovative methods approach in research. Particularly, AIIAO is moving forward to boost reflections to overcome the limits of the current ways to collect data in research, starting to work on its own clear position and on topics, such as big data, artificial intelligence application, and new approaches to analyse data with particular interest towards the Intensive Longitudinal Methods (ILM) [16]. Big data is becoming increasingly a reality and it affects the way nurses learn, deliver care, and conduct research. Broadly, big data are intended to be a complex data collection approach, which overcame the limits current data set, and that gives the possibility to be analysed, revealing patterns, trends, associations related to human behaviour and the collected clinical or social information [17]. For this reason, in this period it is strategic to understand what is really a valid measurement that could be useful as a spendable information within the big data approach. More specifically, cancer nurses have to bring their expertise in measuring and propose to measure with valid tools the most important theoretical constructs (e.g., health literacy, quality of life, patients' engagement, self-care) that could interact with clinical-objective or social information. Hence, in this period it is crucial avoid the pitfalls. For this reason, AIIAO follows the motto '*mind that garbage in-garbage out*' to highlight that the quality of information coming from big data – which can be useful to be applied in computing intelligent algorithms to support clinical decision-making or even to develop 'intelligent' and personalized follow-up – is also a validity matter of the used tools [17]. The new ways to collect data (e.g., the increasing use of telemedicine, apps or surveys) can also be useful to achieve new information through innovative analysis, such as the ILM application. ILM will allow to better understand cancer patients' thoughts, feelings, behaviours describing patients' specific and dynamic within-subject processes, providing temporally rich and specific data to personalize the delivery of care, also customizing the well-established general and standardized follow-ups, approaches, therapies and interventions [16].

Finally, AIIAO is willing to support nurses to bring their expertise and their paradigms also in the research ideas coming from genomics, considering the many recent subfields, such as transcriptomics, proteomics, metabolomics, exposomics, microbiomics, epigenomics (i.e., omics). Those fields are important to develop new approaches, often know as target-therapy medicine. In those areas, cancer nurses have to be supported in education, meanwhile they can also give an important

contribution in develop ideas when the efforts of the basic research are aimed to have relapses on topics such as symptomatology or some outcomes often managed by nurses within the bedside practice (e.g., nutrition outcome, wound care, association between biomarkers and behaviours) [18].

4. Conclusion

AIIAO upcoming agenda takes shape with the aim to best balance the association energy to face with the complex current scenario of the oncology, supporting multi-disciplinarity, networking, research and education. This article presents some reflections, strategies and visions underpinning AIIAO choices, and the association board hopes that this paper is useful to boost debate aimed to critical reflect on how we can add value to cancer care.

Conflict of interests

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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