HUMANIZATION OF CANCER CARE IN ITALY (HUCARE PROJECT): EVALUATION OF AN INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION SKILLS TRAINING COURSE FOR MEDICAL ONCOLOGISTS.

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Background. HUCARE is an ordinary research project funded by the Italian Ministry of Health and Lombardia Region and supported by the AIOM (Italian Association of Medical Oncology). Medical oncologists have considerable needs for communication skills training in cancer care because of the general lack of education and training. One of the main objective of the HUCARE project is to developed and consolidate communication skills of the medical oncologists of participating centres. **Methods**. We planned a three days residential course that included structured feedback, videotape review of consultations, role-play with simulated patients, interactive group demonstrations, and discussion led by a trained facilitator. The structure of the course has been made in agreement with the prof. Leslie Fallowfield (Lancet 2002, 359: 650). Outcome measures included objective and subjective ratings made by doctors before and after each course. Evaluation comprised a questionnaire, which covered basic demographic details, previous experience of communications skills teaching, and 11 visual analogue scales on which clinicians rated their own confidence about common issues in oncology (see table below). A total of 20 courses has been planned for the next two years with 10-20 participants in each edition.

Results: This is a preliminary analysis of the first 2 courses for a total number of 28 medical oncologists coming from 7 oncology centres.

Item	Pre-course (Mean ± SD)	Post course (Mean ± SD)	P value*
How confident do you feel about telling patients:			
1. With a good prognosis that they have cancer	9.00 ± 1.23	9.15 ± 1.78	0.49
2. With a poor prognosis that they have cancer	7.04 ± 2.39	8.04 ± 1.96	0.08
3. That they have a recurrence	7.00 ± 2.44	8.65 ± 1.54	0.03
4. Replacing active therapy with supportive therapy	5.73 ± 2.37	7.46 ± 1.79	0.01
How confident are you about			
5. Discussing psychological problems	6.70 ± 2.70	8.07 ± 1.87	0.01
6. Discussing sexual problems	6.38 ± 2.84	7.50 ± 2.28	0.02
7. Obtaining a real consent form	7.19 ± 2.04	8.30 ± 1.44	0.01
8. Informing about side effects of treatments	8.38 ± 1.52	8.88 ± 1.30	0.13
9. Telling diagnosis to relatives and not patients	4.84 ± 2.47	4.23 ± 2.87	0.32
10. Telling prognosis to relatives and not patients	6.73 ± 2.32	5.46 ± 2.65	0.04

*Student t-test for paired data

Conclusions: To our knowledge this is the first large-scale project aimed at application of communication training course for medical oncologists. In this first analysis a clear improvement of key communication skills has been observed.