

DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE: Improving resource allocation for lung cancer in Latin America

Colombia, May 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The deliberative dialogue was carried out to share evidence among relevant stakeholders regarding allocation of resources for lung cancer care in Latin America, with the objective of effectively contributing to the development and implementation of effective lung cancer policies. The purpose of bringing together different stakeholders to discuss the evidence brief was to listen to their perspectives and experiences on the evidence presented, and to stimulate action for those involved or affected by the policies related to lung cancer.

The dialogue in Colombia was conducted to discuss 1) the problem of lung cancer care in Latin America with a specific focus on Colombia, 2) potential elements to address the problem as well as their relevance and feasibility in Colombia, and 3) barriers to implement those elements. The problem was presented in terms of lung cancer being the number one cause of cancer mortality for both genders in Latin America, tobacco consumption and environmental contaminants acting as the principal risk factors to lung cancer, and the high cost of lung cancer treatment, specifically, coupled with limited budgets in the region that restrict investments in care and innovation for lung cancer. The potential elements to address the problem included:

- 1) Support dynamic efforts to reduce the burden of lung cancer;
- 2) Support innovation in lung cancer prevention and control to improve health outcomes;
- 3) Assess the applicability of economic evaluations for decision making.

Below is an overview of the items discussed during Colombia's deliberative dialogue event, which brought together country stakeholders from local and national governments, medical providers, and civil society.

Deliberation on the problem:

The participants in the deliberative dialogue detected five main aspects that describe the problem in Colombia:

- ✓ The heterogeneity in Colombia throughout the country in terms of access to services and health outcomes;
- ✓ Treatment of lung cancer is not prioritized as the disease is not among the main cancers in the country; the national cancer control plan does not recognize lung cancer as a priority. The cancers in Colombia prioritized in the plan are: cervical, breast, prostate, colon, and pediatric cancers;
- ✓ The cost is high for lung cancer diagnosis, treatment, and care; and the mortality rate from lung cancer is also high. Participants noted that innovative technologies for lung cancer specifically are lagging behind those of other cancers such as breast and prostate;
- ✓ Furthermore, with a rapidly aging population, the country is not prepared to properly confront a rising lung cancer rate;
- ✓ The challenges that continue to exist related to lowering risk factors, especially tobacco use. Other factors were noted too, such as poor air quality;
- ✓ The lack of health professional training and of coordinated and integral care, leading to inefficient diagnosis of lung cancer.

Deliberation on elements:

- 1) Support efforts and other appropriate methods of lowering the burden of lung cancer – The participants agreed that improving communication with the public is key to supporting any initiative related to prevention. They also pointed to the fact that public health efforts do not particularly address the problem of tobacco while the tobacco industry continues to promote smoking among the youth, especially. The participants recognized that an intersectoral approach should be taken to address the problem (i.e. the Ministry of Education with the Ministry of Health). The group also pointed to the need to work on the collective consciousness regarding the importance of ending tobacco consumption, treating it as a serious illness like alcoholism or other drug addictions, and the possibility of involving medical doctors to help gather data on tobacco consumption to better address the problem.
- 2) Promote innovation for the prevention and control of lung cancer allowing improved health outcomes – The participants mentioned that there are certain barriers that limit access to innovation related to the prevention and control of lung cancer, and that it is important to improve information systems as well as the level of education/training, to maintain accurate and up-to-date cancer registries to better address the issue.
- 3) Evaluate the applicability of economic assessments for decision making – The participants concluded that the most important point to conduct economic assessments is to create an integrated database that shows the actual state of cancer throughout the country. At the same time, they also emphasized the need to improve mechanisms and decisions on technologies used for lung cancer and promote socio-economic analyses. Participants proposed the idea of forming a partnership between the education and health sectors and creating a model in which health insurers get paid based on results.

Deliberation on implementation:

In terms of the implementation of these interventions and the barriers faced, the dialogue centered on the following points: 1) how to develop an information system with warnings related to tobacco consumption; 2) the importance of creating new alliances in different sectors, for example between the Ministry of Health and the mining sector, as a way to develop initiatives to control environmental pollution; and 3) the development of strategies to train health professionals in the area of lung cancer. An important barrier identified was the difficulty to implement interventions at the national level. The recommendation was to implement public health interventions at a population level that reaches across the entire country.

Deliberation on next steps:

The dialogue ended with a recognition of the next steps that should be taken to address the problem, including the need to integrate efforts and establishing an intersectoral focus on policies and strategies to be implemented by the government, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders. Participants agreed that the dialogue was a fruitful one that allowed them to see different points of view on the issue.