

Cancer, a new challenge for MSF: example of an oncology in project in Mali

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The emergence of chronic communicable diseases is a new health issue facing resource-limited countries and the medical organizations working in them. Cancer in particular has the greatest inequalities in survival and epidemiological predictions are worrying. It is estimated that by 2040, the number of new cancer cases and deaths in the poorest countries will double and more than 1.2 Million new cases are expected. In 2018, MSF OCP has decided to get involved in the fight against cancer by developing operational projects and investing in access to prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

In Mali, the oncology project, dedicated to cervical and breast cancers (representing 30% of cancers of both sexes), built in partnership with Malian colleagues and ministry of health, started at the end of 2018 with palliative care, then support for screening, histopathology laboratory and specific treatments (surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy). In 2020, MSF provided specific care for 542 patients (366 breast cancers and 176 cervical cancers) and performed 2828 palliative consultations and 3260 tumor wounds care.

This experience confirmed the lack of financial and geographical access to screening and care facilities leading to diagnoses at very advanced stages and the complexity of management and multidisciplinary care pathways. This type of project implies new ways of working for MSF: the development of a holistic and patient-centered approach, long-term projection and working in partnership with national actors and international experts. Research, an essential element, needs to be developed around several axes: epidemiological, therapeutic trials and the introduction and evaluation of technological tools to improve diagnosis and management such as telemedicine and artificial intelligence. Finally, the issues of access not only to treatment but also to diagnosis and prevention are one of the major added values that MSF could bring to the fight against cancer.

Cancer is one of the new challenges that MSF has decided to tackle and for which new ways of working and research are needed.