

IGCS Declaration on Palliative and Supportive Care: Relieving Serious Health-Related Suffering for Women with Gynecologic Cancers

The International Gynecologic Cancer Society (IGCS), representing healthcare professionals, patient advocates, and individuals dedicated to the advancement of women's health, hereby affirms the critical importance of palliative and supportive care in the comprehensive management of gynecologic cancers globally.

Recognizing that:

- Gynecologic cancers, including ovarian, cervical, uterine, vulvar, vaginal, and rare cancers of the female reproductive tract, impact the lives of countless individuals and their families worldwide, often leading to physical, emotional, and psychological suffering.
- There is a critical role for integrating palliative and supportive care into the overall care of women with any kind of advanced cancer originating from the female genital tract to assure a continuum of care throughout the course of the disease.
- The provision of palliative and supportive care is delivered by interdisciplinary care teams and should be based on a patient-centered approach, tailored to individual needs, preferences, and cultural backgrounds.
- Palliative and supportive care is not just end of life care, as it is sometimes perceived. It is an essential component of holistic cancer care that should be delivered alongside curative treatment from the time of diagnosis, focused on improving the quality of life for gynecologic cancer patients and their families.
- Palliative and supportive care aims to alleviate pain and symptom burden, address psychosocial and spiritual needs, and facilitate open and compassionate communication about goals of care and end-of-life preferences.
- Palliative and supportive care, when integrated into gynecologic cancer treatment, contributes to better symptom management, enhanced patient and family satisfaction, and improved patient outcomes.
- Globally, there is a critical need to integrate palliative and supportive care into the holistic care of women with gynecologic cancers as only a very small percentage of those who would benefit have access to palliative and supportive care.
- IGCS members, made up of interdisciplinary members of the cancer care team, have a key role to play in relieving serious health-related suffering for women affected by gynecologic cancers.

As such, we declare IGCS' commitment to the following principles:

1. The Right to Palliative and Supportive Care: Access to quality palliative and supportive care services is a fundamental human right and disparities in access should be addressed with the goal that all patients, regardless of their geographic location, socioeconomic status, or any other factors, receive equitable care.

2. Integration of Palliative and Supportive Care: We advocate for the seamless integration of palliative and supportive care into the holistic care of those with gynecologic cancer, ensuring that it is an integral part of cancer management from the time of diagnosis onward, and not a last resort.

3. Education and Training: We encourage healthcare professionals, including the entire interdisciplinary gynecologic oncology care team, to receive essential education and training in palliative and supportive care to improve their understanding, skills, and knowledge to alleviate symptoms and improve patient outcomes. Additionally, educational opportunities for patients and the public should be made available.

4. Research and Innovation: We call upon researchers, institutions, organizations, funding bodies, and governments to invest in studies that advance our understanding of palliative and supportive care interventions in gynecologic cancer, build capacity, and aim for continuous improvement, innovation, and value-based healthcare.

5. Patient-Centered Approach: We emphasize the importance of adopting a patient-centered approach in gynecologic cancer care, which includes active communication, shared decision-making, and respect for patients' values and preferences.

6. Global Collaboration: We commit to fostering global collaboration among healthcare providers, policymakers, organizations, patients and patient advocates, and other stakeholders to develop and implement policies and programs that prioritize palliative and supportive care in gynecologic oncology.

In recognition of the profound impact that palliative and supportive care can have on the lives of those facing gynecologic cancer, we affirm our commitment to the above principles and pledge to disseminate this Declaration widely. We will work tirelessly to ensure that all patients receive the compassionate, comprehensive, and patient-centered care they deserve. By doing so, we honor the intrinsic value and dignity of every life affected by gynecologic cancer and promote the highest standards of healthcare and compassion worldwide.

Call to Action: Take the IGCS Pledge

IGCS is calling on its members to prioritize and advocate for equity in access to palliative and supportive care worldwide and work with their care teams to ensure patients receive the compassionate, quality care they deserve. Take the IGCS pledge and complete these actionable steps to work towards closing the gaps between curative and palliative care.

1. I pledge to communicate with all patients under my care about their palliative and supportive care needs from the time of diagnosis onward, and not as a last resort.

- I will obtain or develop culturally-appropriate, patient-centered educational material regarding palliative and supportive care to give to all patients with newly-diagnosed, progressive or recurrent gynecologic cancer.
- I will inquire about and support my institution in conducting an annual continuing education program on effective communications skills for health professionals.

2. I pledge to prioritize formal education in palliative and supportive care for myself and encourage education among my team members.

- I will educate myself and encourage those on my institution team to complete formal essential education and training in palliative and supportive care by May 2024 (e.g. IGCS Palliative Care Certificate Program).
- I will contact my departmental and institutional leadership advocating for the incorporation of mandatory palliative care education within training programs, including medical students, residents, fellows and non-physicians (e.g., nursing, social work, mid-level providers)

3. I pledge to integrate palliative and supportive care into the treatment plans for all patients with newly diagnosed, progressive, or recurrent gynecologic cancer under my care, through primary integration or specialist referral.

- I will work to establish and maintain formal relationships with palliative and supportive care services for my patients.

4. I pledge to advocate for patients' rights to palliative and supportive care.

- I will share the IGCS Declaration on Palliative and Supportive Care with my colleagues and institutions working with regional and national health ministries and express my support for palliative care to be included as an essential package of care under universal health coverage.
- I will contact my regional and national health agencies asking for their support.
- I support the formation of National Palliative Care Associations to work with the ministries of health to realize the implementation and promotion of palliative care services.

5. I pledge to advocate for the inclusion of health-related quality of life measures in the study of gynecologic cancer treatment.

- I will advocate for my institution to commit to studies dedicated to the management of patient suffering related to the care of women with gynecologic cancers.
- I will volunteer to serve as a research site for one study investigating palliative and supportive care for women with gynecologic cancer in 2024.
- I will contact my governmental agencies, research funding bodies and community organizations expressing my support for research in palliative and supportive care for women with gynecologic cancer.
- I will commit to reading at least one peer-reviewed article related to palliative and supportive care each quarter and share the information with my team.

6. I support global collaboration and IGCS' efforts to maintain partnerships with international palliative care organizations to develop and implement policies and programs that prioritize palliative and supportive care in gynecologic oncology.