Expanding access to cancer care: Integration of the ECHO model in Southeast Asia

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The Southeast Asia Region faces more than 2.3 million cancer diagnoses and 1.4 million cancer-related deaths each year, according to the WHO. Much of this burden can be overcome through prevention, early diagnosis, and timely linkage to treatment; however, a constellation of geographic- and resource-related barriers constrain delivery of best-practice care. Project ECHO aims to improve these circumstances by supporting providers with an evidence-based model for multidisciplinary, guided practice mentorship and support. **Materials and Methods:** Beginning in 2023, Project ECHO and partners throughout Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and India deployed the ECHO Model to strengthen the skills and capacity of local health care workers in cancer prevention, diagnosis, treatment, survivorship, and palliative care. In these virtual, collaborative learning environments, experts from major cancer care centers engage in continuous telementoring with local health care workers. Zoom video conferencing, the iECHO virtual learning platform, and a central data repository were used to implement and evaluate this initiative. **Results:** Thirty-nine hubs in the targeted countries implemented 102 Cancer ECHO programs. These programs spanned the full cancer care continuum and engaged 66,129 participants across diverse cadres of the health care workforce. Globally, over 200 organizations across 36 countries have implemented more than 800 ECHO programs to improve local cancer care delivery. This scale is accompanied by growing evidence of Cancer ECHOs' efficacy, with over 130 related, peer-reviewed publications thus far. Studies highlight a range of impacts on provider knowledge, confidence, and performance, including statistically significant knowledge gains in topics such as HPV vaccination, tobacco cessation, and oral cancer screening. **Conclusion:** The ECHO Model effectively supports contextualized implementation of best-practice care and builds the capacity of healthcare providers, particularly in underserved populations. Its ability to facilitate knowledge exchange can reduce barriers to cancer care delivery and improve patients' lives at massive scale across Southeast Asia and beyond.

Keywords: Training, mentoring, capacity development, health system strengthening, southeast asia