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The future of the oncology workforce since COVID-19: Results of the ESMO Resilience Task Force survey series

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Background

The ESMO Resilience Task Force has investigated wellbeing since COVID-19 in relation to work, lifestyle and support factors in oncology professionals globally. We reported on the significant impact of the initial surge of the pandemic on wellbeing and job performance (Banerjee *et al.* 2021). As the pandemic continues, it is imperative to understand experiences and concerns to better inform support measures for the oncology workforce.

Methods

Three anonymous online surveys were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (S1, Apr/May 2020; S2, Jul/Aug 2020; S3, Feb/Mar 2021). Longitudinal analysis of responses at these timepoints were conducted. Here, we present responses to questions on job demands and resources, and perceived job performance since COVID-19 (JP-CV).

Results

We analysed 3894 individual responses (S1, n=1520; S2, n=942; S3, n=1432): 53% (n=1961/3731) female, 45% (n=1679/3731) <40 years, 31% (n=1132/3692) non-white ethnicity, >100 countries. There has been significant increases from S1 to S3 (p<0.001) in feeling overwhelmed with workload (29% vs 45%); COVID-19-related clinical (14% vs 58%) and research (16% vs 64%) work; out-of-hours work (16% vs 41%), shift work (12% vs 26%) and overall working hours (17% vs 47%); and inadequate time for personal/family life (35% vs 45%). 59% (n=1156/1946) were unable to take allocated annual leave. While JP-CV has improved (34% vs 49%, p<0.001), there remained concerns about the negative impact of the pandemic on career development/training (43%), job security (37%) and international fellowship opportunities (76%). Overall, less than half had felt supported by their work management, professional societies or government, and/or had access to wellbeing support services. 25% (n=266/1086) were considering changing their future career with 38% (n=100/266) contemplating leaving the profession.

Conclusions

Since COVID-19, oncology professionals have reported increased job demands, concerns over career development/training and job security, and inadequate time for personal life. There is a real threat of potential attrition in the current workforce. National and international stakeholders must act together to ensure robust recovery plans as we emerge from the COVID-19 crisis.

Legal entity responsible for the study

The authors.

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Disclosure

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