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Leadership roles in oncology: Gender is still a barrier. Results from the new ESMO Women for Oncology Committee authorship and monitoring studies

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Background

Since 2015, the ESMO Women for Oncology (W4O) Committee has conducted international monitoring studies charting the representation of female oncologists in leadership.

Methods

We evaluated representation of women as 1) first and last authors in 5 major oncology journals for 2017-2022, and 3 additional journals since 2020 (Annals of Oncology, ESMO Open, New England Journal of Medicine), 2) invited speakers at conferences and within boards of professional societies in 2020-2022, in comparison with previously published results from 2016-2019.

Results

Monitoring data are reported on 35 oncology congresses with 6551 speakers and 50 societies with 607 board members. Women were less likely to be invited speakers compared to male colleagues in all years ($p < 0.001$). However, an increase was observed in recent years ($p < 0.001$). Female representation was consistently greater at international than at national congresses ($p < 0.001$), with a significant overall region effect observed ($p = 0.0035$). Women were less likely to be board members of oncology societies ($p < 0.001$), however, an increase in female board members in both international ($p < 0.001$) and national societies ($p = 0.022$) was observed over time. Female representation as society presidents increased (10.4% in 2016 vs 34% in 2022, $p < 0.001$). Female oncologists were more likely to be board members if societies had a female president ($p < 0.001$). In the first author analysis (2179 publications per year), 35-41% of first authors were female, with no significant change over 6 years ($p = 0.66$). The representation of women as last author varied between 24-30% since 2017. Female authors were significantly more likely to be first versus last authors ($p < 0.001$).

Conclusions

Although there has been progress towards gender equity in oncology leadership positions, representation of women is still low at congresses, in society boards and as leading authors in publications. Continued monitoring and systemic changes to increase opportunities for female leadership is essential to accurately represent the oncology workforce and encourage a culture of equity, inclusion and diversity.

Legal entity responsible for the study

ESMO W40 Committee.

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Disclosure

H. Linardou: Financial Interests, Personal, Advisory Board: Roche, AstraZeneca, MSD, Merck, Takeda, Bristol Myers Squibb, Lilly, Pfizer, GSK; Financial Interests, Personal, Invited Speaker: Roche, AstraZeneca, MSD, Bristol Myers Squibb, Pfizer, Amgen, Novartis; Financial Interests, Personal, Stocks/Shares: BioPath Innovations S.A.; Financial Interests, Personal and Institutional, Local PI: Bristol Myers Squibb, Boehringer Ingelheim, Roche, AbbVie, Lilly, Novartis, AstraZeneca, Amgen, PPD, Parexel ILR, Qualitis, Health Data Specialist; Financial Interests, Institutional, Local PI: GSK; Non-Financial Interests, Principal Investigator: Hellenic Cooperative Oncology Group; Non-Financial Interests, Leadership Role, Elected Chair of the Scientific Committee: Hellenic Cooperative Oncology Group; Non-Financial Interests, Member of Board of Directors: Women 4 Oncology - Hellas, Fairlife Lung Cancer Care, Hellenic Cooperative Oncology Group, Hellenic Foundation for Cancer Research; Non-Financial Interests, Leadership Role, Legal Representative: Women 4 Oncology - Hellas. 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