

# Addressing disparities in funding for robust cancer research

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Dear Editor,

I read with interest the recent article published in this journal when the authors explored the various cancer vaccine strategies for treating diffusely infiltrating gliomas or some types of brain tumors. They emphasized vaccine therapies' potential benefits and challenges in these specific patient populations.<sup>1</sup> With this, it dawned on me how important the role played by research is for experts to come up with such immunotherapy and cancer vaccines. Developing new immunotherapies through robust research benefits cancer patients by boosting their immune systems and helping the body find and destroy cancer cells. However, a significant problem that hinders the attainment of a successful research agenda is funding disparity.

In a recent study, the authors evaluated the National Cancer Institute's funding distribution to the most common cancers, considering their respective public health burdens and exploring associations between funding and racial and ethnic disease burden. Their findings revealed that funding across cancer sites is not concordant with lethality and that cancers with high incidence among racial and ethnic minorities receive lower funding.<sup>2</sup> I firmly share and support this claim concerning the urgent need to mitigate funding disparities in research. Also, I cannot help but compare a related scenario regarding cancer research funding disparity in the Philippines.

Research is a systematic investigation that is designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. It can be information-based, where there is an analysis of data and biological samples that were initially collected for diagnostic, treatment, or billing purposes and are now being used for new research purposes or a clinical trial where patient volunteers participate in studies to test the efficacy and safety of new medical interventions.<sup>3</sup> Research results in discoveries, new therapies, drug development, and remarkable healthcare

improvement. The development of *Herceptin*, for example, as a treatment for breast cancer is an example of the benefits of research using biological samples and patient records.<sup>4</sup> Thus, these benefits validate how vital research is in the healthcare field in every nation.

In the latest data, cancer is the third leading cause of death in the Philippines, with lung cancer ranked as number one in mortality. There are 184 cases diagnosed in 100,000 patients, and 96 deaths related to cancer are reported daily.<sup>5</sup> According to the Philippine Institute for Development Studies researchers, the government only funds some 40% of total cancer expenditures. Most funds used to treat cancer are financed through out-of-pocket payments and private insurance.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, there is inadequate funding for research on cancer screening and diagnosis, which is one of the leading causes of late cancer diagnosis in the country. The cancer gaps, such as technical knowledge, financial coverage, resource availability, and surveillance, must be improved.<sup>7</sup>

With the availability of local experts and researchers from the country, cancer research can rise to a higher level and minimize the adverse effects of the dreaded disease. But this will only happen if sufficient funding is also available. This is where the government, in collaboration with private and non-governmental organizations, can work hard to strategically produce, allot, and manage appropriately the needed funds. With this collaboration, there is always a fight for the Big C!

## Declarations

*Ethics approval and consent to participate*

Not applicable.

*Consent for publication*

Not applicable.

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*Competing interests*

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

*Availability of data and materials*

No new data were generated or analyzed for this correspondence.

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