

HUMAN RESOURCES FOR TREATING NEW CANCER CASES IN GHANA

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to describe the human resources needed in Ghana to treat new cancer patients. The population of Ghana is approximately 25.55 million (13 million men and 12.55 million women) and the estimated number of new cancer cases in Ghana for the year 2012, based on GLOBOCAN data (<http://globocan.iarc.fr/>) for Ghana as a whole was 15820 (6498 in men and 9322 in women) (Table A).

The five most common cancers in Ghana are (1) gynecological (cervix uteri, corpus uteri and ovary), (2) breast, (3) liver, (4) urological (bladder, kidney, prostate and testis) and (5) hematological malignancies (Hodgkin lymphoma, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, multiple myeloma and leukemia).

Table A: The ten most frequently occurring cancers in Ghana for men and women based on 2012 GLOBOCAN data.

Cancer	BOTH SEXES		MEN		WOMEN	
	Incidence	Rank	Incidence	Rank	Incidence	Rank
All cancers excl. non-melanoma skin cancer	15820		6498		9322	
Gynecological	3677	1			3677	1
Breast	2260	2			2260	2
Liver	1923	3	1502	1	421	4
Urological	1460	4	1260	2	200	7
Hematological	1223	5	744	3	479	3
Head and Neck	889	6	589	4	300	5
Colorectal	637	7	402	5	235	6
Stomach	463	8	312	6	151	8
Lung	348	9	270	7	78	9
Pancreas	190	10	120	8	70	10
Melanoma of skin	123	11	55	10	68	11

Newly diagnosed cancer patients need pathology, surgery, chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy. The number of oncologists needed is based, therefore, on the number of patients requiring pathology, surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy (Table B). This number is estimated from the percentage of patients requiring surgery, chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy for the top ten cancers in both men and women.

For developing countries the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) recommends training Radiation/Clinical Oncologists who can prescribe both radiation and chemotherapy for the common solid cancers, instead of separate medical and radiation oncologists. Hematological malignancies are treated primarily by hematologist-oncologists. The number of specialists needed is based upon the number of cancer patients but each city, in order to ensure coverage if one person leaves or goes on vacation, must have at least 2 surgical oncologists, 2 radiation/clinical oncologists, 2 hematologist oncologists, etc.

Table B: Number of Oncologists needed for Ghana's 2 most populous cities based on 2010 population estimates (<http://citypopulation.de/>) and 2012 GLOBOCAN data for new cancer cases.

	Population	New Cancer Cases	Hematologist Oncologists	Surgical Oncologists	Radiation / Clinical Oncologists	Urologic Oncologists	Gynecologic Oncologists	Pathologists
Accra	2070463	1283	2 ^y	2	7	2 ^y	2 ^y	3
Kumasi	2035064	1261	2 ^y	2	7	2 ^y	2 ^y	3

^yAt least 2 are needed in each city.

In addition to oncologists, support staff such as onco-pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, oncology nurses and palliative care specialists is also needed. Many cancer patients require hospitalization for diagnosis, treatment and/or complications, therefore an adequate number of oncology beds will be needed. The number of oncology nurses, onco-pharmacists and pharmacy technicians needed is based upon the number of beds occupied daily by cancer patients while the number of palliative care specialists is based on the number of new cancer cases per year (Table C). The oncology nursing staff for each 24-bed oncology unit (operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week) comprises of one head nurse and a nurse specialist as well as 13 nurses working 8 hour shifts, 5 days per week.

Table C: Number of Oncology Units, Nursing and Pharmacy Staff needed for Ghana's 2 most populous cities based on 2010 population estimates and 2012 GLOBOCAN data for new cancer cases.

	New Cancer Cases	Maximum # of beds/day	# of 24 bed oncology wards	Onco-Pharmacists	Onco-Pharmacy Technicians	Palliative Care Specialists	Oncology Nursing Staff other than Radiation Oncology Nurses
Accra	1283	22	1	4	6	3	15
Kumasi	1261	21	1	4	6	3	15

Since many cancer patients require radiotherapy, appropriately equipped facilities will be needed along with radiation oncology staff (Tables D and E). Radiation oncology staff includes radiation therapy technicians, medical physicists, Linac engineers and radiation oncology nurses in addition to radiation/clinical oncologists. The minimum radiation therapy equipment requirements are at least one of each: Linac, brachytherapy unit, CT simulator, treatment planning computer and dosimetry/quality assurance package.

Table D: Radiation Therapy Staff needed for Ghana’s 2 most populous cities based on 2010 population estimates and 2012 GLOBOCAN data for new cancer cases.

	New Cancer Cases	Radiation / Clinical Oncologists	Radiation Therapy Technicians	Medical Physicists	Linac Engineers	Radiation Oncology Nurses
Accra	1283	7	9	3	2 [¥]	3
Kumasi	1261	7	8	3	2 [¥]	3

[¥]At least 2 are needed in each city.

Table E: Radiation Therapy Equipment needed for Ghana’s 2 most populous cities based on 2010 population estimates and 2012 GLOBOCAN data for new cancer cases.

	New Cancer Cases	Linacs / Co 60 Megavolt Units	# of Brachytherapy units	# CT simulators	# of treatment planning computers	# of dosimetry/QA package
Accra	1283	2	1	1	1	1
Kumasi	1261	2	1	1	1	1

NOTE: Guidelines from the IAEA of the United Nations were used to calculate the radiation therapy equipment and staff needed in the setting of a developing country. Guidelines from the Oncology Nursing Society were used to calculate the number of nurses needed. Several other specialty societies were also requested to provide guidelines but in most cases there were none, therefore colleagues active in those fields were consulted for estimating the number of staff needed.