

Spotlight on quality treatment and care

Dr Michal Chovanec currently works as a clinical oncologist at the National Cancer Institute of Slovakia, where each year he generally treats around 300 newly diagnosed patients and survivors suffering from testicular germ cell tumours (TGCT), which are responsible for the highest number of cancer deaths among young men. These tumours develop in germ cells located in the testicles. In parallel, he carries out translational research on the development of new treatment regimens, including immunotherapy, for this disease. This work illustrates his commitment to providing quality treatment, which is an important component of 'Treatment for All'.

In 2015, Dr Chovanec completed a UICC fellowship on clinical and translational research in TGCT at the Indiana University Simon Cancer Center in the United States, one of the leading centres in testicular cancer treatment and research, under the supervision of Professor Lawrence Einhorn, who is an oncologist known for curing testicular cancer by pioneering first line and salvage chemotherapy regimens.



Improving cancer control in Slovakia

Dr Chovanec made impressive strides both during and after his fellowship, improving his clinical skills and co-publishing a number of articles with Professor Einhorn, including a [review](#) in *Nature Reviews Urology*, where he is first author. Following his time at Indiana University, he returned to Slovakia with new information and new best practice to improve cancer control in his country, including:

- **Instigating a new high dose chemotherapy treatment protocol for TGCT at his cancer centre**

This type of treatment has been successfully used in the United States for many years. It was brought to the forefront by Dr Einhorn and is considered the most successful for treating relapsed testicular cancer and contributes to testicular cancer's higher survival rates. Dr Chovanec implemented this type of treatment into his own practice and taught other doctors about this treatment.

- **Researching late toxicity management of TGCT**

Dr Chovanec cares deeply about improving the life of patients after treatment. Many testicular cancer survivors suffer from hearing loss, neuropathy and/or heart disease because they underwent treatment. This research focuses on reducing these side effects and predicting which patients are susceptible to experiencing long-term side effects. The aim is also to investigate further issues in quality of life resulting from the late toxicity. The results from his work were presented at the Genitourinary Cancers Symposium 2018 and can be found in the scientific article, 'Long-term cognitive functioning in testicular germ-cell tumour survivors', in the journal *Oncologist*.¹



¹Chovanec, Michal & Vasilkova, Lucia & Setteyova, Lucia & Obertova, Jana & Palacka, Patrik & Rejlekova, Katarina & Sycova-Mila, Zuzana & Kalavska, Katarina & Svetlovskia, Daniela & Mladosevicova, Beata & Mardiak, Jozef & Mego, Michal. (2018). Long-term sexual functioning in germ-cell tumor survivors.. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*. 36. 549-549. 10.1200/JCO.2018.36.6_suppl.549.

- **Facilitating the transfer of knowledge to his colleagues**

Dr Chovanec aims to successfully transfer knowledge by establishing seminars that occur twice a week and a journal club that meets once a month. In the journal club, he gives younger doctors and colleagues valuable learning opportunities by having them analyse and present journal articles to their peers. Additionally, speakers from Indiana University presented on surgical procedures and management of critically ill testicular cancer patients in Slovakia. These are clear examples of his belief to “be active, not passive in order to make the most of my fellowship experience,” and Dr Chovanec continues to plan new teaching opportunities for his surgeons, with more speakers anticipated to visit later this year.

Challenges and next steps

Although Dr Chovanec was able to bring about change in his community, he recognised that one fellowship is not enough to address all the challenges a country may face in cancer control. He specified a few challenges remain in Slovakia, such as:

- **Lack of international training for oncologists** - He emphasised that more doctors need to go abroad so that they may obtain the knowledge and training that other countries are privileged to have.
- **Lack of resources for treatments** - He noted that novel treatments are expensive and hard to access in his country.
- **Lack of clinical commercial trials** - These also put Slovakia at a disadvantage since it reduces access to inexpensive, new drugs.

Dr Chovanec is working diligently to improve the number of high-profile clinical trials available in Slovakia, and is seeking international collaborations to help contribute toward addressing some of these challenges.

Dr Chovanec providing ‘Treatment for All’

Overall, Dr Chovanec’s fellowship experience is a great example of what [Treatment for All](#) intends to accomplish. By bringing back techniques he learned from his time in the United States, he was able to increase the number of people who received care for testicular cancer, as well as increase the effectiveness of treatment and quality of care for patients. Additionally, his continued research on late toxicity management is an example of seeking to improve supportive care for survivors to improve quality of life. Ultimately, by bringing advanced techniques from the U.S. to Slovakia, Dr Chovanec is contributing to Treatment for All’s mission of collaboration and knowledge sharing to promote greater health equity around the world.