

## ”Comment on: [Pediatric oncology infrastructure and workforce training needs: A report from the Pediatric Oncology East and Mediterranean (POEM) Group]”

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**Comment on: [Pediatric oncology infrastructure and workforce training needs: A report from the Pediatric Oncology East and Mediterranean (POEM) Group]**Julietta Simonyan<sup>1</sup>, Lusine Hakobyan<sup>1,2</sup>, Medea Anastasiadi<sup>1,2</sup>, Lilit Sargsyan<sup>1,2</sup>, Lala Vagharshakyan<sup>1,2</sup>, Ruzanna Papyan<sup>1,2</sup>, Lusine Krmoyan<sup>1,2</sup>, Mihran Martirosyan<sup>1</sup>, Samvel Danielyan<sup>3</sup>, Armen Muradyan<sup>1</sup>, Gevorg Tamamyan<sup>1,21</sup> Yerevan State Medical University, Yerevan, Armenia<sup>2</sup> Pediatric Cancer and Blood Disorders Center of Armenia, Hematology Center after Prof. R.H. Yeolyan, Yerevan, Armenia<sup>3</sup> Hematology Center after Prof. R.H. Yeolyan, Yerevan, Armenia Corresponding Author: Simonyan Julietta, MD, Yerevan State Medical University, Koryun 2, AM0025, Yerevan, Armenia, Phone: +37499492660, Email: simonyanjulietta@gmail.com Main text word count: 546 References: 1 A short running title: First pediatric hematology-oncology fellowship program in Armenia Keywords: pediatric hematology-oncology, fellowship, Armenia In the recent PBC paper by Khan and colleagues<sup>1</sup>, the pediatric oncology workforce training needs for the East and Mediterranean region were examined and reported. Armenia, as a part of the Pediatric Oncology East and Mediterranean (POEM) Group, was among the study participants and respondents. At the time of the survey in 2018, Armenia didn't have a pediatric hematology/oncology training program, which was accordingly reported. In this letter, we describe the recent developments in that regard and the establishment of the first pediatric hematology/oncology fellowship program in our country. On September 4, 2014, the Government of the Republic of Armenia (RA) approved a list of narrow medical specialties of the RA, where one unified specialty - pediatric hematology/oncology was mentioned for the first time. Before that, two separate specializations were existing – pediatric hematology and pediatric oncology, and to obtain those qualifications, it was necessary, after the completion of MD program at the medical university (6 or 7 years), to continue either with an oncology residency program (2 years, which later became 3 years), or hematology program (3 years). Both curricula included pediatric and adult programs, accordingly, the fellows were practicing both pediatric and adult medicine. Before 1998 at the Yerevan State Medical University (YSMU), a faculty of Pediatrics existed with a pediatric-only MD program, however, it was closed in 1998. To become a pediatric hematologist or pediatric oncologist, after the pediatric MD program, graduates were entering into hematology or oncology training, focusing on the pediatric part. Taking into account the successful programs implemented into pediatric hematology/oncology in our country, as well as the dedication and willingness of the local specialists and the need for new specialists, on June 26, 2019, the Board of Trustees of YSMU decided to establish the Department of Pediatric Oncology and Hematology, with a “pediatric hematologist-oncologist” fellowship program and on July 1, 2019, by the decree of the Rector of YSMU, the Department was established. The fellowship program has been adapted based on the educational programs of

St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, Dana-Farber/Boston Children’s Cancer and Blood Disorders Center, and the American Board of Pediatrics programs. In the first year, five clinical fellows entered the program, and two hematology fellows of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year, respectively, transferred to our program. During the second year, three more fellows successfully joined the program, so the number of pediatric hematology – oncology fellows became 10. Besides clinical skills and knowledge, special attention was dedicated to the research component of the program, and a mandatory requirement of conducting research and publication of at least one peer-reviewed article in an international reputable journal was introduced for the completion of the fellowship program. Another mandatory requirement for fellows is the knowledge of at least two foreign languages (mostly English and Russian). These two requirements were introduced for the first time in Armenia. It is worth to mention, that within 2 years since its establishment, pediatric hematology and oncology fellowship program became one of the successful programs at the medical university. Although, at the beginning we were thinking that high requirements might add additional difficulties to attract young physicians to join this emotionally and professionally difficult profession, but it was just the opposite: some of the best graduates with the highest performance chose pediatric hematology-oncology and joined the program.

**References**1. Khan MS, Al-Jadiry MF, Tarek N, et al. Pediatric oncology infrastructure and workforce training needs: A report from the Pediatric Oncology East and Mediterranean (POEM) Group. *Pediatr Blood Cancer*. 2021;68(9). doi:10.1002/PBC.29190