

The care of cancer patients in the Balearic Islands: Results of a collaborative agreement

*La atención al paciente oncológico en las Islas Baleares:
Resultados de un acuerdo de colaboración*

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Abstract

The results of a collaboration agreement between the Balearic Islands Board of the Spanish Cancer Association and Atenzia are presented. The evaluation of the first signed agreement led to its renewal, which has led to proactively making 1,818 calls to cancer patients and / or their families and to responding and attending 592 calls, 19% of them due to social or health emergencies. Requests made from the four Balearic Islands were attended. The average age of the users of the offered resource has been between 70 and 80 years, 64% women and 36% men. New areas of joint action for the following years are presented.

Keywords: Attention, care, cancer patient.

Resumen

Se presentan los resultados de un convenio de colaboración entre la Junta de Baleares de la Asociación Española contra el Cáncer y Atenzia. La evaluación del primer convenio firmado llevó a su renovación, lo que ha permitido realizar proactivamente 1.818 llamadas a pacientes oncológicos y/o sus familiares y a responder y atender 592 llamadas, el 19% de ellas por emergencias sociales o sanitarias.

Se han atendido solicitudes realizadas desde las cuatro Islas Baleares. La edad media de los usuarios del recurso ofrecido ha sido entre 70 y 80 años, 64% mujeres y 36% hombres. Se presentan nuevas áreas de actuación conjunta para los próximos años.

Palabras clave: Atención, cuidados, paciente oncológico.

Introduction

In addition to promoting the culture of health and cancer prevention and supporting biomedical research in oncology¹, the Spanish Cancer Association (SCA) provides²:

- Medical and nursing guidance in order to clarify doubts related to the diagnosis and treatment of cancer and its possible side effects.
- Home and hospital accompaniment.
- Psychological and social care, to collaborate in facing the emotional discomfort caused by the disease and its treatments and, at the same time, improve communication with family and friends.

The psychological and social comfort of the cancer patient conditions their prognosis. We have known for

a long time³ that a positive environment around the patient causes their greater adherence to the treatment protocols in application and consequently improves their prognosis. In this line, the Balearic Islands Board of the SCA (BIB SCA) believed that reinforcing this action was a priority objective to be covered in the short term, a work proposal that was definitively settled with the publication by the European Union in February 2021 of its Policy Document on Cancer, in which, among others, it calls for unity of action to more effectively confront the fight against cancer in all its aspects⁴.

To this end, the BIB SCA decided to establish a collaboration agreement with Atenzia, an organization with 25 years of experience in tele-assistance and permanent care, with a portfolio of services that includes emergency

care, psychosocial support, promotion of healthy habits, therapeutic adherence and monitoring of vital signs⁵, a work that Atenzia carries out using three service modalities: home tele-assistance with a fixed line (TAD), home tele-assistance without a fixed line (TAD GSM) and tele- mobile assistance (TMA). In 2021, a fourth modality is incorporated to the service that is executed through an APP, integrating the service on the patient's and family's mobile, which makes it more comfortable and discreet. The service has also three strategic actions: 24-hour telephone service, proactive and personalized monitoring and group workshops.

This agreement, which gave rise to the *Servicio Contigo*, was signed on April 10, 2017 and in which it is literally stated that "The purpose of this Agreement is to establish a framework of action and joint relations between the BIB SCA and Atenzia, with in order to add value to the care offered by the BIB SCA to people suffering from the disease and their families, through Atenzia's fixed or mobile tele-assistance service that guarantees the patient security and 24-hour support, while at the same time allows and offers the BIB SCA, optimization of resources, active participation in its preventive and research work and recruitment of new partners / collaborators".

The main results obtained by the community application in the Balearic Islands of the *Servicio Contigo* are set out below.

Results

About the modality of the service

- Device modality: 13% TMA, 87% home TAD. The percentage of mobile TAM has decreased compared to other years, in 2019 it stood at 30%.
- Reasons for withdrawal: 50% due to death, 30% due to requiring other support such as residence admission, and 20% due to the end of the BIB SCA subsidy period: in 80% of these cases, 80% continued privately with the service, an obvious marker of satisfaction and usefulness of the service.

Performance data

- Average number of contacts: In 2020, a total of 1,818 calls were made from the Customer Service Center (CSC) (average of 151 calls / month). This figure increases, logically, with the increase in active patients. In 2021 (until 06/15/2021) the CSC has already made 1,100 calls, which represents an average of 183 calls / month.

Answered calls (alarms)

- Up to 06/15/2021, 592 calls made by patients and / or their families have been answered. According to 2020 figures, 19.60% of the alarms attended have been due to a health and / or social emergency that have required the immediate mobilization

of emergency resources. 12.50% have been "unanswered alarms" corresponding to two types of situations: involuntary pressing or a serious emergency in which the person has been able to press to activate the service, but is not in a position to speak. The rest of the calls or alarms received (67.30%) correspond to various situations that do not imply an urgent action: call to speak, to communicate some information, to request information ...

Procedures and demands attended

Different types of situation / demand have been carried out and attended to:

- Positive COVID19
- Need for accompaniment to go to a medical appointment, for the purchase ...
- Situations of risk / need detected in the weekly follow-up calls: financial difficulties, emotional problems ...

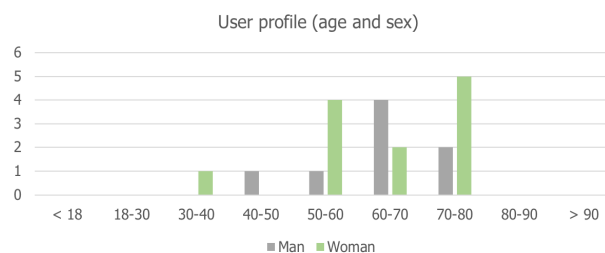
Participation and evaluation of activities (data until 2019)

Since the beginning of the service, a total of 13 activities have been carried out in the context of the BIB SCA - Atenzia collaboration. We have been increasing the number of activities each year (3 activities in 2017, 4 activities in 2018, 6 activities in 2019) with a reach of 168 people and an average of 12.92 participants per activity. Patients, relatives and the general population have attended these activities and in them we have been able to publicize the *Servicio Contigo* as well as put patients in contact with other people and strengthen their support network.

Data about the person attended

- **Age:** the band with the most users is 70-80 years, noting a progressive increase in the age of users.
- **Sex:** 64% women and 36% men. **Table I** shows how the percentage of women exceeds that of men in all ranges except those aged 60-70 years, in which men represent 66% of the total number of patients seen.
- **Area of residence:** 57% live in urban areas and 43% in rural areas. It is very important to objectify the territorial equity with which the service has been implemented: there are active patients on the four islands: Mallorca 61%, Menorca 4%, Ibiza 31% and Formentera 4%.
- **Coexistence unit:** 64% of the patients cared live accompanied and 36% live alone. Sometimes the partner is a family caregiver and on other occasions it is people who are in charge of the patient.

Table I



Time spent in the service

People active in the service accumulate an average of 11.04 months of service. There is a case that has been in service since the beginning and has already accumulated 4 years. There are 3 people who have been in the service for 2 years and 4 who have already been active in the service for 1 year. The rest of the active people (64%) have signed up for the service in 2021.

Discussion, conclusions and proposals

After analyzing this performance data of the *Servicio Contigo*, which we believe are very satisfactory, Atenzia and the BIB SCA considered renewing and expanding the terms and content of the *Servicio Contigo*, signature that was made on June 8, 2021. In the debate prior to this signature, it was proposed and agreed to collect more data from the beneficiaries, in an attempt to complete and consolidate the definition of their profile, as detailed below:

- Days and times of the calls received, in order to detect the time and day of the week in which the most calls are received and consequently arbitrate a consistent organization of resources.
- Identify and record which person in the coexistence unit usually answers the follow-up calls from the Attention Center.

- Precise characterization of the users and especially those who decide to continue with the *Servicio Contigo* after the end of the AECC subsidy, collecting and noting:
 - Cancer type.
 - Type of treatment.
 - Quality of life level.
 - Profession of the patient.
 - Profile of the people with whom he / she lives (family caregiver, minors in her charge, dependents in her charge ...)
 - Data about the caregiver:
 - State of health.
 - Dependency (yes / no)
 - Changes in their situation as a consequence of caring for the patient: work, economy, health, residence, family, personal projects....

In short, there is a firm commitment on the part of the two signatories and heads of the *Servicio Contigo* to reinforce and expand its application, thus contributing in a way that we believe can be decisive in the social and psychological well-being of cancer patients living in the Balearic Islands, commitment that we make public by publishing this article.

Interests conflict

The researchers declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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