Paediatric Neuro-oncology Neuro-oncologie pédiatrique

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Over the last 30 years, improvements in imaging, surgical approaches, pathological diagnosis, radiotherapy techniques and chemotherapy drugs have radically improved survival rates in children with brain tumours. Historically these children were managed mainly by neurosurgeons or radiation oncologists with ad-hoc input from other disciplines. But it has become increasingly obvious that they do far better when they have an integrated team of experienced carers making therapeutic decisions and following them up long term.

At Groote Schuur and Red Cross Children's hospitals in Cape Town, we have had a combined clinic making decisions about children with brain tumours for more than two decades. Hosted by radiation oncology and attended by neurosurgeons and paediatric endocrinologists since its inception, the 21st century has heralded more active participation by paediatric oncologists, as chemotherapy is becoming an increasingly important part of the treatment of many of these children. The clinic has also been joined by an educational psychologist and has input from social work and occupational therapy. This mirrors an international trend that has seen the establishment of paediatric neuro-oncology programmes in most major paediatric oncology centres. These are multidisciplinary teams comprising a wide spectrum of medical and allied staff.

In 2008, our combined neuro-paediatric–endocrine clinic identified the fact that paediatric brain tumours receive very little attention at the conferences run by the South African Society of Radiation Oncology (SASCRO) and the South African Children's Cancer Study Group (SACCSG). Moreover, access to high quality international meetings (such as SIOP and ISPN) is limited because of the expenses involved. Our solution was to initiate a Paediatric brain

tumour Workshop in Cape Town, to coincide with a meeting of the ISPN (International Society of Paediatric Neurosurgeons).

Professor Eric Bouffet, head of the newly developed neuro-oncology programme at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Canada, was invited to be our keynote speaker. Professor Bouffet had previously been a key part of similar programmes at the Royal Marsden Hospital in England as well as in Paris. The response to our workshop was overwhelming. Delegates from all over South Africa, and from as far afield as Nigeria and Saudi Arabia presented cases. Professor Bouffet commented on the aspects of management, as well as delivered didactic talks on building a neuro-oncology programme and on new developments in paediatric neuro-oncology. He stated that he was strongly in favour of evidence-based protocols, with a combined team approach, and access to studies for diseases with a poor prognosis. He indicated the willingness of his team in Toronto to advise our teams at any time, and this has proven to be invaluable over the subsequent years.

In 2009, we invited Dr Frank Saran (a paediatric radiation oncologist at the Royal Marsden hospital in London, and current chairman of PROS (Paediatric Radiation Oncology Society)) to be our main speaker. Dr Saran is well known in paediatric radiotherapy circles for his input in developing protocols for paediatric radiotherapy. He gave presentations on the current trends in paediatric radiation oncology for brain tumours, including supine craniospinal radiotherapy techniques, recent dosage modifications for localized ependymoma and discussed the management of paediatric CNS germ cell tumours. At the request of the delegates from the previous workshop, we also included lectures from local experts on the pathology of brain tumours, advances in neuro-radiology and advances in paediatric neurosurgical techniques including physiological monitoring and endoscopic surgery. Cases were presented once again, and delegates declared the workshop a real success.

There appears to be enough momentum to sustain an annual paediatric brain tumour workshop meeting. It allows local experts to get together and discuss cases and protocols, and it allows all of us to gain from the knowledge of

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respected international experts in this field. We hope to host a well-known paediatric neurosurgeon as the keynote speaker for our next workshop. We hope once again to have delegates from all of the disciplines mentioned above and from all the centres in South Africa, as well as some

from further North. We hope that the knowledge gained will allow multidisciplinary teams in other centres in South Africa and throughout Africa to create dedicated neuro-oncology programmes. We also recognise the potential for creating a South African paediatric neuro-oncology society.