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Since its inception in April 2009, the NCCN/Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Guideline Initiative has reached important milestones in the adaptation and implementation of the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines) in the MENA region. The initiative was launched with an introductory meeting and committee formation among regional experts who convened to adapt NCCN Guidelines to the region. During these 5 years, the teams achieved many remarkable tasks, including:

- Completing the adaptation and publication of NCCN/MENA Guidelines in 6 disease sites (non–small cell lung, breast, colon, hepatobiliary, and prostate cancers; and lymphoma) in 2010, published as a supplement to JNCCN
- Establishing a MENA Regional Center for NCCN Collaboration at National Guard Health Affairs in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to coordinate regional activities
- Holding 3 regional meetings in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and in Doha, Qatar
- Completing the adaptation and publication of guidelines in NCCN format in 2014, to be available at NCCN.org
- Gaining experience in the process of adapting guidelines, which is probably the most important accomplishment, because it will propagate the concept of evidence-based medicine in the region; the development of an easy tool for adaptation helped streamline the discussion and make the process easier and more practical
- Increasing the number of unique visitors from the region to the NCCN Web site (NCCN.org) 5-fold over the past 5 years, and noticeably doubling this number the year the initiative was launched (2009; Figure 1)

Figure 1 Unique visitors to NCCN.org from the Middle East and North Africa region, 2008–2013.
• Raising awareness about the need for cross-border collaborative activities to answer important questions regarding cancer epidemiology and disease management, which resulted in some regional projects that came to fruition.

• Fostering intellectual and educational interaction between regional experts and those in the United States. The regional experts learned about the function and process of NCCN as an organization with monumental experience in the field with its own culture and style, whereas the NCCN experts had the opportunity to see their guidelines through the eyes of external reviewers (the regional experts) who reviewed these guidelines with a different perspective and examined them in close detail, which sometimes resulted in NCCN adopting some of the new ideas generated from the region, such as the addition of treatment of some types of lymphomas (T-cell lymphomas).

Expectedly, challenges exist for such projects because of the heterogeneity in socioeconomic status and available resources among countries in the region. Therefore, it was critical to agree to keep the guidelines at the highest possible standards and avoid defaulting to the creation of “convenience” guidelines. The guidelines were adapted to meet the needs of countries with the best access to resources to encourage others to improve care and raise their standards, keeping in mind that each country, or even each institution, may need to perform further adaptation or create their own pathways according to their settings and resources.

The dispersion of committee membership across wide geographic regions presented logistical challenges that the groups tried to overcome through electronic communication and holding committee meetings concurrent with other medical meetings or events for member convenience.

In summary, the NCCN/MENA Guidelines Initiative is contributing to the MENA region’s awareness of oncology guidelines and enhancing collaborative activities across borders. The future direction of the initiative involves including more disease sites, expanding membership, and focusing on implementation and adherence issues.

References


