



Cancer in Andorra ► We talk to Javier, a cancer patient, to tell us about his experience in the

The fight for a Radiotherapy Unit and more oncologists

Assandca insists on the Government to improve cancer treatment in the Principality and avoid transfers to Barcelona

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The situation in Andorra regarding cancer patients is at a delicate point. The reason is that the Principality lacks another oncologist who can attend to patients and that in this way their worries and insecurities, related to the disease, which creates the long hours of waiting without knowing if they have it or how it is evolving. This, not to mention the daily journeys that patients must make to Barcelona in order to receive their radiotherapy treatment. The Andorra Against Cancer Association (Assandca) has been insisting for a long time on the Government to build a Radiotherapy Unit in the country, so that patients do not have to travel to receive this treatment.

The president of the associati-

on, Josep Saravia, explains to EL PERIÒDIC that «for two years the Government has stood aside without giving any kind of explanation, simply with the excuse that exclusive treatment is given here to each patient», to which Saravia responds by saying that «the fact of not having a Radiotherapy Unit and sending patients for treatment in France or Barcelona would break for us the theme of excellence that the Executive says, with which the patients do not have an excellent treatment, but they have a treatment that is good, but the fact of going down and up is destroying them.» Saravia also recalls that an agreement had been reached with Toni Martí's legislature to set up the Radiotherapy Unit and all that was left was to start it up, but as a result of the pandemic «it was pushed back without any explanation». ≡



ASSANDCA

►► Image of a physical activity class organized by Assandca.

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«Going down and up from Barcelona every day to do radio kills a person». This is how Javier, a cancer patient, describes his experience. Javier is a 61-year-old man who was diagnosed with cancer of the tongue, and a few months later he was diagnosed with another cancer of the esophagus one year and a half ago. From EL PERIÒDIC we wanted to talk to him to explain his testimony.

Javier was treated for tongue cancer in the Principality, and with esophageal cancer he underwent radiotherapy in Barcelona and finished chemotherapy in Andorra, so he has a global view of the two perspectives of a cancer patient who lives in the country.

The people who go down to have radiotherapy in Catalonia take a taxi provided by the Government, and «they are patients who, instead of taking two or three hours on the journey, can be around five or six, because the fact of moving after treatment it causes them a lot of nausea and they have to stop every 10 minutes», explains the president of Assandca, pointing out that when talking to taxi drivers «they tell us that they are very afraid that some patient will be left in the taxi dead», as they are not medical transport.

In order to alleviate this problem, the association is trying to reach agreements with foundations in Spain to obtain supervised flats where patients can stay during treatment. In Javier's case, with the help of Assandca and an association in Barcelona, he managed to find a flat near the hospital. These flats cost 12 euros a day and are shared with other patients. If a person has an economic problem, the association tries to help them to the best of their abilities, but Assandca claims that «theoretically there is the Social Department that should help them, but sometimes it is slow to react».

Regarding the services in the Principality, Saravia explains that in Andorra any type of cancer is detected, the follow-up and post-treatment if everything has gone correctly, «but all the operations are done downstairs, in the Principality only the chemotherapy sessions and some small tumor interventions, and also treatments related to skin cancers, since there are dermatological clinics in the country that provide this service to patients and treat them from the beginning to the end,» points out Saravia.

For his part, Javier explains that «the Government should help financially the people who are undergoing these treatments and these diseases». Now, he will request that they give him absolute disability,



►► A photograph of Javier.

The patient beyond

Javier has had two cancers, and explains the consequences

Taxi drivers who get around patients are afraid that someone will die, as they are not medical transport

since he has the second degree because of the hip prostheses he wears, but «it's been a year and a half since I started with one cancer, then with the other, and this it's weakening a lot». The main improvement with which both Javier and Assandca agree is with the Radiotherapy Unit, which they consider almost essential. Javier also points out that «apart from building this unit, Andorra needs some more oncologists», and points out how serious it is for him every time he goes for a check-up and sees many people waiting for hours and hours, «becau-

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se an oncologist cannot treat all the people there are sick».

At this moment the two cancers that the witness has had are at rest and inactive, and the last tests have turned out very well. Therefore, in terms of everything else, he is happy because he is getting out of it, but he says that the situation cannot continue like this: «**People cannot have a visit every three months or be waiting for a test for two months. We are not talking about a cold, we are talking about a cancer that can take your life in a month. One treatment or test a little late, and it's over.**».

The task of Assandca

The president of Assandca explains that the patient who goes to the association is a patient who is alone, who does not know where to go, «when the disease is diagnosed and there is a moment of disorientation, it is at that moment when the patient comes, but he comes to ask for information: where he should go, how he should go, what aids he has, because no one informs him directly about this, they give him some guidelines within the hospital and that's it.» Servaria points out that no one explains to them that if they have financial problems they can get help from the Social Department; that can go to the CASS; that there are some taxis that the Government has to get around and that are free of charge; «**they need a little more support in the area of what they have to do, what they have to practice, not only during the treatment, but when this patient is in the midst of the disease, he does not know with whom to speak because he does not want to increase the suffering of the family, and then he needs someone who can speak.**» For this reason, from the association they do yoga or gymnastics sessions, which «**makes the patients socialize a little, that this loneliness disappears, and they find a group of people who are going through the same thing as them and in this moment is emotionally draining. They are patients who above all need company, not because they don't have family, but because they don't want to cause distress to the family.**».



XAVIER

EVIDENCE OF CANCER

«The Radiotherapy Unit is very necessary, going down and up from Barcelona after doing radio, it kills»

«Andorra needs another oncologist. There are people waiting a long time because it is not possible to deal with all the patients»

«We are talking about a cancer that can take your life in a month. A late treatment can be lethal»

Each year they propose five actions that they do so that people know that they continue to exist and that they exist to help them. People can sign up as collaborators, volunteers of any kind, and obviously they can contribute the amount of money they want, «we do actions so that they know us and that they can contribute to us». A few months ago they just opened their place where they hold a series of sessions in the afternoons for volunteers, who are sometimes the patients themselves, and are collaborating with some action. Saravia explains that this month «**we are doing skin treatment sessions for people who are undergoing chemotherapy and radiation, which causes excessive dryness in their skin, and with specialist people we are giving a series of guidelines,**» from the summer they will start holding a series of support sessions for relatives and patients, with two people who do coaching who will give guidelines to be braver in the face of this disease, «we all try to push it forward from the best way we know, but we don't always approach it in a positive way and not only the patient, but many times those who suffer are those around them», points out the president of the association.

Another of the points that the association is fighting for is to put the figure of a permanent psychologist within the Psychology Unit, «**we think that there are several points within the disease that there is a need to have by the patient's side a psychologist specializing in oncology.**» Saravia explains that the first is when the disease has just been diagnosed, «**it's a moment when the person is lost and disoriented. We as an association try to reorient this person to where he needs it, but it is true that we believe he would need this figure by his side.**» The other very critical moment is chemotherapy, «**the first chemotherapy, it is not a moment that lasts 10 minutes, we are talking about hours and hours, where the person gives it to recollect, to think and sinks in that moment.**».

and the disease

ences of undergoing one of the treatments in Barcelona

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