

# Beyond the Hospital Walls: Hospital at Home Programs for Cancer Patients Worldwide and the Road to Implementation in Greece

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## Background

- **Hospital at Home (HaH) programs** are emerging as an innovative approach to provide comprehensive care to patients with cancer globally and are gaining recognition in the Greek healthcare system. [1,2]
- **Cancer patients often require intensive medical care**, including chemotherapy and symptom management. [1]
- Hospital at Home (HaH) programs are emerging as an **innovative approach to provide comprehensive care** to cancer patients globally and are gaining recognition in the Greek healthcare system. [1]
- They offer an **alternative to traditional inpatient care** by delivering these services in the patient's home environment [1,2]

While HaH programs have been implemented globally, their applicability and barriers and facilitators for their implementation in the Greek healthcare system require examination.

## Objective

- **Global Perspective:** To identify HaH programs for cancer patients worldwide.
- **Comprehensive Overview:** To describe their services, eligibility criteria, target population, model of care, and program characteristics in HaH programs.
- **Local Implementation:** To explore the applicability of global HaH programs in the context of Greece and to identify barriers and facilitators for implementing HaH programs in Greece.

## Methods

- A **targeted literature review** was conducted, encompassing both global and Greek HaH programs for cancer patients.
- A **broad array of sources** were considered, including PubMed, organization websites, reports, and grey literature.
- Inclusion criteria spanned **adult and pediatric programs, irrespective of cancer type**, and included data published in English, French, or Greek from 2000 to May 2023.
- A **narrative approach** was employed to extract and synthesize data on program **services, eligibility criteria, target populations, model of care**, and **program characteristics**.

## Conclusions

### General conclusion for Greece:

- Successful HaH program implementation in Greece requires proactive measures to overcome barriers and leverage facilitators, ensuring safe and effective patient-centered care.
- Comprehensive policy development, regulation, guidance, quality standards, infrastructure investment, electronic prescribing, and standardized triage protocols are fundamental to the success of HaH programs in Greece that will expand current homecare programs for oncology patients.

### Recommendations for Greece:

- **Patient-centered Triage:** Develop standardized triage protocols based on patient-reported outcomes to assess patient preferences and eligibility for HaH.
- **Evaluating Cost-effectiveness:** Conduct rigorous cost-effectiveness evaluations of chemotherapy delivery in the home setting to inform decisions.
- **Investing in Resources:** Commit to investment in medical, human and financial resources to ensure safe and effective delivery of HaH services.
- **Complication Management:** Establish detailed escalation plans to manage treatment complications in the home setting.
- **Enhancing Medication Safety:** Implement electronic prescribing to enhance medication safety and efficiency by reducing medication errors.
- **Policy and Guideline Development:** Recognize HaH as a real alternative to hospital administration in cancer care, update guidelines accordingly, and encourage collaboration between stakeholders in healthcare.

## Results

- The study revealed that **HaH programs** for cancer patients **are available globally**, including countries like Australia [1], the United Kingdom [2], the United States [3-5], France [6-7], Belgium [8], Sweden [9], and Canada [10].
- **Comprehensive Services:** These programs offer a wide range of services, [11] encompassing infusion-based programs [6–8], symptom management [12], post-operative care [13], remote monitoring [12], end-of-life care [13], and clinical trial participation. [14]
- **Eligibility Variation:** Eligibility criteria are not uniform and may target patients in need of acute cancer care or chemotherapy. [7]
- **Innovation in Care:** A relatively new care approach in Greece, a HaH program named “OIKOTHEN” that General Anticancer Oncology Hospital of Athens “O Agios Savvas” developed, is set to provide cancer treatments at home. This program is designed to improve patients’ quality of life above all else, leading to a better recovery rates. [18]
- **Present State in Greece**, the HaH model of care remains a new approach. A recent legislative decision has set the initial rules of organizing, structuring and implementing a HaH model in Greece including oncology treatments. [16] With the new legislation, a pilot home care program was initiated named “NOSPI” and was undertaken by the Agency for Quality Assurance in Health (ODIPY) includes 10 hospitals throughout Greece and among other indications, it also focuses on providing “OIKOTHEN” services. [17]
- **Palliative Care** The unit "GALILAIA" [19] and the Spiliopoulou Pathological Hospital offer palliative care and end-of-life services. [20]
- **Challenges to implementation** include patient and provider willingness, legal, organizational, and reimbursement issues, as well as patient selection. Recognizing and addressing these barriers is crucial for the successful implementation of HaH programs. [4]
- **Challenges in Greece:** Implementation challenges include the willingness of patients and healthcare providers to embrace HaH programs, legal and organizational issues, and regulatory issues regarding the administration of pharmaceuticals in an outpatient setting. [4]
- **Funding Dilemmas:** Reimbursement and funding challenges remain a key obstacle, with a lack of specific payment mechanisms. [21]
- **Regulatory Complexities:** Regulatory issues pose a substantial challenge to HaH program implementation, including the recognition of HaH centers and regulation of medication administration. [4]
- **Facilitators for Implementation:** Successful implementation of HaH care involves recognizing and leveraging facilitators. These may include the development of policies, regulations, and guidance to ensure adequate organization, funding, safety, and sustainability.

## References

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