



Dr. Angelita Habr-Gama Named Honorary Member by ASTRO



Internationally renowned surgeon Angelita Habr-Gama, MD, PhD, has been named the 2014 ASTRO Honorary Member by the American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO).

This is the highest honour awarded by ASTRO and Dr. Habr Gama has been selected from many distinguished cancer researchers, scientists and leaders. The Award will be presented to her on Tuesday, September 15 at the 56th Annual Meeting organised by ASTRO at Moscone Centre in San Francisco.

Dr. Habr-Gama joins the prestigious group of 31 ASTRO honorary members who have already been bestowed this award since 1989. Dr. Habr-Gama has conducted significant research in developing and promoting nonoperative treatment approaches for rectal cancer. She has published 177 articles in peer-reviewed medical journals.

She is a professor of surgery at the University of Sao Paulo School of Medicine and staff surgeon of coloproctological surgery at Hospital Alemao Oswaldo Cruz in Sao Paulo, Brazil. She is also the founder of the Division of Coloproctology at the University Of Sao Paulo School Of Medicine and has been a member of the Board of the Oncology Foundation since 1990. Dr. Habr-Gama is a strong believer that customising treatment for each individual patient is critical in providing optimal cancer care.

Colleen A.F. Lawton, MD, FASTRO, chair of ASTRO's Board of Director recognises Dr. Habr-Gama's efforts and says, "Her continued study of additional treatment strategies and her emphasis on a change in the standards of care demonstrate her dedication to improving the lives of cancer patients worldwide."

Dr. Habr-Gama is well-known for her landmark paper "Operative versus nonoperative treatment for stage 0 distal rectal cancer following chemoradiation therapy: long-term results" that was published in the Annals of Surgery in October 2004. This paper was based on her discovery that patients with rectal cancer, and who had received neoadjuvant chemoradiation therapy, did not have residual cancer. When these patients were reassessed after eight weeks, some tumours had completely disappeared. Dr. Habr-Gama's research indicated a 100 percent five year overall survival rate and a complete response of the primary tumour in patients with locally advanced rectal cancer treated with chemoradiation therapy.

Dr. Habr-Gama has been a bold advocate of the role radiation therapy could play in renal cancer treatment and has demonstrated through her research that it is indeed a safe and valid alternative if considered individually for each patient. She strongly believes that investigators should reconsider preoperative radiation for rectal cancer before marginalising it from standard treatment.

Her efforts and her research are expected to have an impact on treatment approaches across the globe. Her team has published several prospective and retrospective studies that further evaluate the clinical responses of patients and the safety of preoperative radiation. The evidence collected from these studies clearly demonstrates that select patients with complete clinical response to neoadjuvant chemoradiation therapy may be safely spared from immediate radical surgery.

Additionally, through Dr. Habr-Gama's efforts, more and more people in the surgical, medical and radiation oncology communities will understand the role of "watch and wait" when managing patients with rectal cancer.

Source: American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO)

Image credit: Gastroclinica

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