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Introduction

Chimeric antigen receptor T-cell therapy (CAR T-cell therapy) has changed the treatment of relapsed/refractory (R/R) hematological malignancies, offering outstanding clinical outcomes and reshaping patients' care landscape. The introduction of this therapy presents substantial economic and organizational challenges for the Italian National Healthcare System (INHS) and places a significant burden on patients and families.¹

Patients identified for CAR T-cell therapy need to go through a complex treatment journey with multiple steps; moreover, a key issue is the mobility of both the patient and caregiver due to frequent medical visits and continuous monitoring, especially if they live far from specialized centers located in other regions.¹

(According to the Italian D.lgs. 23 Dec 1992, n. 502; D.lgs. 19 Jun 1999, n. 229; Riforma del titolo V della Costituzione, 2001, legislative and financial autonomy are granted to the Italian regions, while still subject to a regulatory framework established at the national level).²

The caregiver's role is both essential and demanding, since responsible for managing transportation and daily care during a period of increased physical and emotional vulnerability: 66% of caregivers are forced to leave their jobs due to a lack of adequate support in patients' journey in Italy.¹

Objective(s)

A comprehensive support program aimed at reducing both the emotional and practical burden throughout the CAR T-cell therapy journey has been developed in Italy since July 2022.

Method(s)

The Patient Support Program (PSP) “CARe-Together” is the first Italian program for patients seeking CAR T-cell therapy, designed to facilitate their journey with personalized services.

The PSP was co-created and implemented in collaboration with dedicated vendors, treating physicians, patient representatives, and caregivers to identify value-added solutions for the care pathway.

An intuitive digital platform has been developed to help patients access professional caregiving services and healthcare support.

The former includes various services provided by trained caregivers, such as transportation, assistance with bureaucratic procedures and daily activity support. Healthcare support includes psychological care, nutritional and physiotherapy services.

A qualitative questionnaire was administered to Healthcare Professionals (HCPs), patients and family caregivers to assess:

- the usefulness of the CARe-Together Support Program;
- the role of both steward and support provided during the use of the Program;
- the range and quality of services offered;
- the impact of the Program on patients' Quality of Life (QoL).

To assess satisfaction levels, all parameters were evaluated on a scale ranging from 1 to 10, with 1 indicating the least positive perception, and 10 indicating the most positive perception.

Result(s)

The PSP, launched in July 2022 with 4 Italian QTCs, will expand to 5 additional centers throughout 2024 to increase territorial coverage following its success.

Among a total of 287 patients intended to CART T-cell therapy in these centers, 48 patients were enrolled as of November 30th, 2024. 501 services were provided, including 344 professional caregiving services, 87 physiotherapy services, 56 nutritional services, and 14 psychological services (**Figure 1**).

Number of participants who responded to the survey: HCPs 4/4 (100%); patients 21/28 (75%); family caregiver 9/28 (32%). The survey was in Italian (score range: 0–10; 0 indicating the least positive perception and 10 the most positive perception).

According to the results of the survey completed by HCPs, patients and family caregivers (**Table 1**), HCPs rated the steward's support throughout the program as highly useful, giving it a score of 9.5 out of 10; the range of offered services received a rating of 8.0. Patients and family caregivers also reported that the program significantly improved their quality of Life (QoL), streamlined the patient journey, and made it easier to manage, with scores of 9.6 and 9.7, respectively.

References

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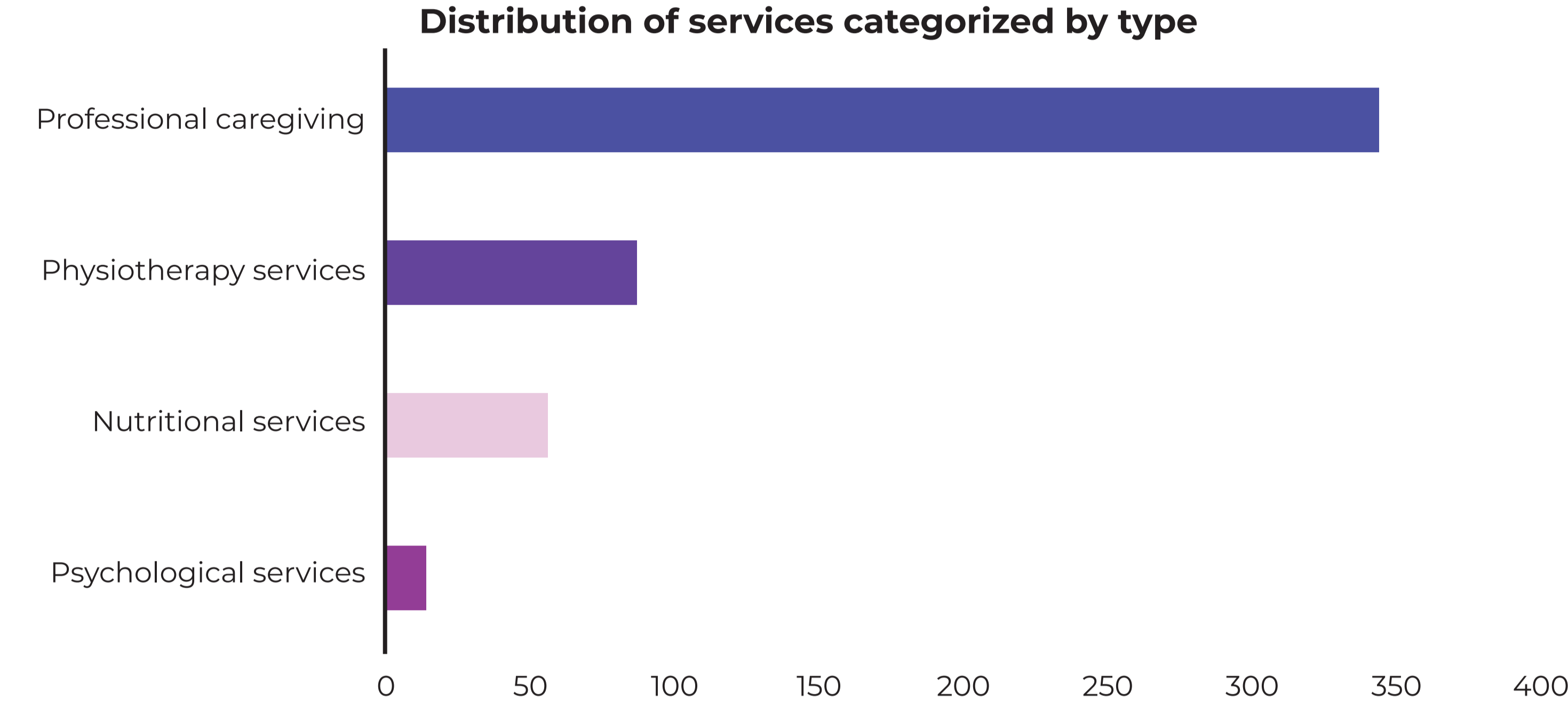


Figure 1. Distribution of services categorized by type.

Question	HCPs	Patients	Caregiver
How useful is the “CARe-Together” Support Program?	8.0	9.8	9.7
Clarity of objectives	8.0	NA	NA
How useful are the role of the steward and the support provided during the use of the “CARe-Together” Program?	9.5	9.8	9.7
How do you rate the range of support services offered by the Program?	8.0	9.4	9.8
How do you rate the quality of the support services provided?	9.0	9.7	NA
Has the support program been effective in improving the Quality of Life of patients and making the treatment process easier?	8.0	9.6	9.7

Table 1. Survey Results (score range: 0-10). Median value reported. 28 patients had requested services when the survey was sent out. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary for all responders. Responders included: HCPs 4/4 (100%); patients 21/28 (75%); family caregiver 9/28 (32%). The survey was in Italian.

Conclusion(s)

The results emphasize the crucial role that a caregiver plays in a patient's journey with CAR T-cell therapy, underscoring the need of improved focus on both social and healthcare support services. This highlights the significance of an integrated care model that not only provides access to healthcare but also addresses the broader needs of patients and caregivers. In this context, the PSP “CARe-Together” offers a successful example of a public-private partnership.

Following its success, the PSP “CARe-Together” has been expanded to 5 additional centers throughout 2024 improving territorial coverage.

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