

It was 2018, and I was a fifth-year medical student at Yerevan State Medical University. Word spread that our new oncology professor was someone extraordinary: Gevorg Tamamyan – a Harvard-trained, Nature-published pioneer of pediatric oncology in Armenia and president of POEM. Naturally, we Googled him. We read the papers, scrolled through posts, and quickly realized he wasn't just teaching oncology – he was shaping it.

During our brief rotation, Professor Tamamyan brought oncology to life with real patient stories, global guidelines, and relentless encouragement to apply for opportunities. When he shared two student programs—one from [ESMO](#) and the other from the [European School of Oncology \(ESO\)](#)—I chose the ESO-ESTRO-ESSO Course for Medical Students, a two-week summer school in Torino, Italy. Back then, I was set on neurology and arrived in Torino unsure of what oncology could offer. Landing in Italy, I didn't expect a seismic shift. But it happened. At Molinette Hospital, surrounded by 25 students worldwide, I saw a version of oncology I'd never imagined—where research, compassion, and community collided. Immunotherapies. CAR-T cells. Cancer vaccines. Concepts I'd never heard before. And just like that, I knew: I wanted to be part of this. I had found my home.

Fast forward to 2020, I found myself confidently choosing oncology residency at [Yeolyan Oncology and Hematology Center in Armenia](#).

Under the guidance of Armenia's first ESO Ambassador, Jemma Arakelyan, and with incredible mentors like Dr. Liana Safaryan and Dr. Davit Zohrabyan, I was constantly encouraged to think bigger and push harder.

Just two months into residency, the ESO Clinical Masterclass opened for applications. I jumped at the chance, applied, and got accepted. Then the pandemic hit. The masterclass went virtual. Yet, it became another essential milestone for a young oncologist—hearing directly from the people who shape the global standards we study every day.

But my dream of studying abroad was still alive. Years earlier, I had been accepted to Cambridge Medical School, but couldn't attend. So when I saw ESO offering a single funded place for the Master's in Precision Oncology at the University of Cyprus, I knew I had to try. The process felt like an exam in itself: TOEFL, endless paperwork, recommendation letters, three visa rejections, countless embassy calls, and stretched nerves. At the same time, I had another offer through the ERASMUS program in Porto. It's true. Life is about choices, and every choice you make makes you.

So I did what I always do—I opened Excel, listed pros and cons, measured long-term impact, and chose the less easy, but more promising road: Cyprus, with ESO.

Why Cyprus? Because it felt like an investment in future impact.

And the right mentorship can change everything.

Professor Anastasia Constantinidou supervised my academic training and welcomed me into her clinic at the [Bank of Cyprus Oncology Center](#). That's where I had my first real exposure to sarcomas, clinical trials, research, and an entirely new healthcare system. I started learning the language of trials, AI, molecular profiling, and biostatistics. Back then, it all felt theoretical, far from our daily reality. But those same tools helped me coordinate Armenia's first Investigator-Initiated Clinical Trial two years later.

I even published my first paper with Dr. Constantinidou and Dr. Robin Jones from The Royal Marsden—someone I later had the chance to meet in person. Proof that every choice you make shapes your future and often finds its way back to you.

One afternoon in Cyprus, I got an email from everyone's favorite person—ESO's heart, Corinne Hall. If you've ever applied to an ESO program, you've probably met her kindness. She wrote that ESO's CEO, Professor Alberto Costa, would be in Cyprus and wanted to meet us. That conversation about our experience, goals, and expectations was a turning point. He listened. And most importantly, he believed. And sometimes, that's all you need to keep going.



March 2022, Nicosia, Cyprus, with Prof. Costa, Christos, Pampina

Whatever happens—or doesn't—has its reason. Try again. Try harder.

After graduating, I started working as a consultant oncologist and joined the Immune Oncology Research Institute as a research fellow. But I hadn't forgotten my earlier goals.

I applied again the following year for ESO's CTC fellowship at the Istituto Nazionale dei Tumori in Milan. I got the interview. I was nervous, but my eyes were sparkling with motivation—ready, as I love to say, to conquer the world.

I didn't know then that the person interviewing me, Dr. Salvatore Provenzano, would soon become both a mentor and a friend.

I was accepted to Paolo Casali's department—the same name I had once seen only in webinars and paper titles. Milan was intense in the best possible way. Every morning started with an Italian lesson at 7 a.m. Then, I read a research paper on the tram. Then, it was the clinic and Italian coffee.

Most of my days were spent in the inpatient unit, where Dr. Provenzano patiently walked me through every case, every treatment, every nuance. His kindness matched his brilliance, and that rare gift of being both an exceptional doctor and a generous teacher. For the first time, I truly began to understand sarcoma from the inside out. No question was too small. No moment wasted. Every day mattered.

Fueled by that experience – and with some spare time for academic work – I stayed as proactive as ever. I kept coming up with new ideas, sending papers, asking for feedback, pushing for more. One day, after yet another idea, Dr. Provenzano looked at me, smiled, and asked with a laugh:

“Do you ever stop, Amalya?”

To be fair, they were having incredibly busy days—back-to-back meetings, routine clinical challenges, and a new article draft on the table. If you're reading this... I'm sorry!

But to every young doctor out there: if you want your idea reviewed or your paper seen, you must follow up. Gently. Repeatedly. Be respectfully pushy. Sometimes, that's how progress happens.

No, I don't stop.

Because in a world full of opportunities, there's no time to stop.



November 2024, ESO CTC Fellowship in Milan with Salvatore Provenzano, Mary Ann, and Helena.

I wanted to share what I was learning, so with ESO and Dr. Provenzano, we recorded a podcast on angiosarcomas—part of what I hope becomes an ongoing “Rare Tumor Podcast” series, because knowledge should never stay in one room.

When I returned to Armenia, my department trusted me to handle all new sarcoma cases. And that's what three focused months, the right mentor, and the right opportunity can do. If you told me this in

2018, I would've laughed.

I started as a junior researcher and volunteer at [OncoDaily](#), curating papers. Now I lead our Research and Intelligence Unit with a team of twelve. Because it doesn't matter how small you start, as Dr. Tamamyan says: "Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you'll land among the stars."

The journey isn't just built on luck but on sleepless nights, hard choices, and relentless curiosity. And it hasn't been all success - there were rejections too. But what matters isn't perfection—it's progress. Three months after my Milan fellowship, my abstract was accepted for a mini oral presentation at ESMO's Sarcoma & Rare Tumor Congress. Standing on that stage—among people whose names once lived only in my reference list—gave me the energy to do more and made me feel that I hadn't disappointed those who believed in me. I hoped they were proud.

Just weeks ago, back in Milan, I saw Professor Costa again. Three years later, this time, I wasn't the student with questions—I was sharing results, ideas, and gratitude for believing. I told him how much ESO had shaped me—how it became my first oncology school—and continues to be.

Because ESO doesn't just teach, it listens. It challenges. And it believes in you before you believe in yourself.



20 March, 2025, ESMO Sarcoma and rare cancer congress, discussion on stage between two ESO Fellows

As we prepare for ESO's first-ever Convention in Budapest, I hope this story inspires another young doctor to leap. Apply. Ask questions. Show up. And never underestimate the power of a single opportunity.

Dream big. Work hard. And keep checking the ESO website.