

# A Delphi Consensus in Integrative Oncology: Towards Shared Principles and Criteria for Integration

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## BACKGROUND

Integrative Oncology (IO) combines evidence-oriented complementary and integrative medicine (CIM) with conventional cancer care to improve symptom management, quality of life and patient-centred support. Although many Swiss cancer centres offer IO services, **a national framework has been lacking**. To address this, representatives from multiple institutions founded the **Swiss Network for Integrative Oncology (SNIO)** in 2024.

A key initiative is the development of a **national consensus** defining Shared Principles of CIM practice and criteria for safe and effective integration of CIM into oncology care.

## OBJECTIVES

The SNIO Consensus Project aims to:

- Define **Shared Principles** describing core concepts and professional standards of CIM practice in oncology.
- Establish **Integration Criteria** outlining conditions for high-quality CIM use within oncology pathways.
- Develop a **national, interdisciplinary consensus** involving oncology, nursing, CIM experts and patient representatives.
- Prepare the final consensus for **peer-reviewed publication and national implementation**.

## METHODS

### Topic & Statement Development

**Goal: Develop initial list of topics and preliminary draft statements for the consensus**

- Topics proposed by Steering & Scientific Committees
- Expansion based on expert feedback at SNIO Consensus Kick-off (SOHC 2024)
- Draft statements prepared and iteratively revised
- Consolidated draft prepared for Delphi Phase 1



### DELPHI Phase 1: Shared Principles

**Goal: Define Shared Principles of CIM practice in oncology**

Panelists:

- CIM physicians and CIM-trained oncology nurses from SNIO centres

Method:

- Anonymous Delphi voting (Likert 1–5) via REDCap
- Consensus defined as ≥80% agreement (ratings 4–5)
- Non-consensus items revised for next round
- Up to 3 rounds planned
- Same methodology as in Phase 2



### Structured Feedback Round

**Goal: External validation of Shared Principles** by head oncologists and-oncology nurses of SNIO centers



### DELPHI Phase 2: Integration Criteria

**Goal: Develop Integration Criteria for CIM within oncology pathways**

Panelists:

- CIM physicians and CIM-trained oncology nurses from SNIO centres
- Head oncologists and oncology nurses
- Patient representatives

Method: same as in phase 1.

A Consensus Conference may be added if key items remain unresolved

## RESULTS

By September 2025, a **comprehensive catalogue of topics and preliminary statements (table 1 and 2)** has been completed for both Shared Principles and Integration Criteria. Consolidated statements are prepared for **Delphi Round 1 (autumn 2025)**.

Standardised consensus thresholds, voting structure and feedback processes have been established.

The project is progressing according to plan, with **Phase 1 about to begin**.

Table 1:

### SHARED PRINCIPLES Subject to Delphi voting

#### Draft topics:

- View of human beings
- Health & illness (salutogenesis)
- Self-efficacy
- Communication skills
- Evidence-based practice
- Research
- Multi-professionality
- Self-reflection
- Self-care of HCPs
- (...)

#### Example of a draft statement:

Health & illness (salutogenesis): “Salutogenesis plays a central role by identifying and strengthening individual health-promoting resources.”

Table 2:

### INTEGRATION CRITERIA Subject to Delphi voting

#### Draft topics:

- Basic oncology training for CIM professionals
- Basic CIM knowledge for oncology HCPs
- Communication of CIM within oncology teams
- Referral criteria to other HCPs
- CIM use at end of life (benefit–risk assessment)
- Access & equity
- Evidence-based CIM (“can” recommendations)
- Handling drug–herb interactions
- Managing refusal of conventional therapy
- (...)

#### Example of a draft statement:

Communication of CIM within oncology teams: “Clear, transparent communication of planned CIM interventions with all involved healthcare professionals is essential to ensure safe, coordinated care.”

## CONCLUSION

The SNIO Consensus Project represents the **first national Delphi process** to define quality-oriented principles and integration standards for CIM in Swiss oncology. Strengths include multidisciplinary expertise, patient involvement, and a transparent, reproducible methodology. The final consensus will support **consistent, safe and evidence-informed IO practice** across Switzerland and may serve as a model for other countries.