

The European Cancer Mission: Reaching the moon with our feet on the ground

TOWARD EUROPE'S NEXT GENERATION OF CANCER CONTROL AND RESEARCH

Research and innovation are the keys to continually rolling back the harm that cancer causes to society. But these are only part of the well-functioning ecosystem that is needed to control and reduce the disease to bring better health outcomes to Europe's patients.

Other ecosystem elements include prevention and diagnosis, improved health literacy and education, the vigorous exchange of best practices between the research and public health sectors, well-functioning health systems and more strategic use of data – all driven by patients' needs and expectations.

This session was led by a panel of policy makers in health and in research, together with a patient representative. They engaged participants to explore how to build the ecosystem that will deliver the cancer groundshot.

What's needed, they say, is an 'integrated approach' that drives multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary action for cancer control. The EU's new Cancer Mission – part of the upcoming EU Horizon Europe research agenda – promises a moonshot approach to bring together all players in society to find new cures and reduce cancer's impact on the population.

Session panelists discussed a less technocratic, more patient-focused approach than they see in the US cancer moonshot model. They called for a 'groundshot' to deliver 'improved, equitable, sustainable and affordable cancer outcomes, in data-enabled health systems, bringing better outcomes to 738 million EU citizens.'

The progress of this effort is guided by the Lancet Oncology Groundshot Commission, a group of leaders and experts working to identify cost-effective and proven measures that exist today, that can be shared to improve cancer prevention and treatment. The initiative is a call to action for all of Europe, with an emphasis on Eastern Europe.

The groundshot also calls for a more networked exchange of practice, research and learning on what is working in cancer control, by creating and linking cancer centres in every European country.

Increasing health literacy and bridging Europe's East-West divide in access to the best treatments

KEY MESSAGE

If we don't focus on people as the priority over technology and really put the patient first, we won't be able to solve Europe's cancer problem. This is what 'Groundshot' thinking is all about – focusing the best science and innovation on the real needs of our society.

and cancer care are two priority areas for action. One participant commented that all European citizens are entitled to the same levels of access and care, saying that it is not acceptable that a country's economic level should determine the level of health of its citizens. So the issue that many citizens in lower income locations face today is less of a cancer problem than a problem of inequality in health.

Panelists stressed the importance of cooperation, sharing of know-how and practices and training of healthcare professionals.

Investment is required in data collection and sharing to better understand what is working well, and where improvements are needed so that health and research systems deliver better outcomes to their citizens. Early diagnosis was highlighted as another practical strategy that will make a difference, and an important research area that requires adequate funding.

Delegates welcomed the innovative and forward-looking concept of the EU Cancer Mission and its potential to harness science to deliver real outcomes to Europe's citizens. But if this is to be truly effective as a



tool for society, the Mission's Board composition needs to be revised. If cancer research is about people not technology, the patients and their representatives need to have a political voice, in positions of influence to shape the Mission's policies and programmes.

A look at pan-European cancer figures makes a compelling case for thinking out of the box and rolling out new, aggressive approaches to the fight against cancer:

- » Across Europe one person dies every three minutes from some form of cancer, a situation approaching epidemic levels.
- » The International Agency for Research on Cancer predicts that by 2030, the number of new cancer cases occurring every year will double, reaching some 22 million.
- » The cancer survival rate in Western Europe is up to 40% higher than for its Eastern counterparts. Poland registers lung cancer mortality at 83% compared to the EU average of 56%; Romania's cervical cancer mortality is 14%, compared with the EU average of 3.7%.
- » Factors causing higher cancer mortality in Europe's lower income economies include late diagnosis, a lack of multidisciplinary teams and community engagement efforts, less priority given to oncology and health systems, poor infrastructure, low investment in financial and human resources, lack of access to innovative treatments and information, and lower coverage, quality, and frequency of primary prevention.

The Lancet Oncology article – Cancer groundshot – going global before going to the moon. <http://bit.ly/31WvThu>

Beating Cancer is 'Mission Possible' – statement of MEP Against Cancer group. <https://bit.ly/2GpHoqV>



Prof Mark Lawler, Queen's University Belfast and the European Cancer Concord

'Putting a person on the moon': How to deliver mission orientated cancer activity

What have we learned so far; what are the secrets of mission success?

Dr Jan-Willem van de Loo, Scientific and Policy Officer, European Commission Directorate-General for Research and Innovation: Update on the background and current status of the EU Cancer Mission

Prof Thierry Philip, President, Organisation of European Cancer Institutes (OECI), convenor of stakeholders for consensus positioning on cancer mission matters (see special issue, *Tumori Journal*, June 2019): The need for a mission to fight inequalities in cancer across Europe

Prof Mark Lawler, Queen's University Belfast and the European Cancer Concord: Work of the *Lancet Oncology*

Cancer Groundshot – cost-effective, practical and proven measures for improving outcomes to fight cancer that are yet to be fully taken up across Europe

Panel perspectives:

Prof Gilles Vassal, Past President of the European Society of Paediatric Oncology (SIOP Europe)

Prof Véronique Trillet-Lenoir, MEP, Liste Renaissance, France

Moderators:

Prof Mark Lawler, Queen's University Belfast & Vice President of the European Cancer Concord

Gilliosa Spurrier-Bernard, ECCO Patient Advisory Committee and Melanoma Patient Network Europe