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Position Paper

Managing cancer in the EU: The Organisation of European Cancer Institutes (OEI)[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Organization of European Cancer Institutes (OEI) has the mission to facilitate the development of European comprehensive cancer centres by integrating care and prevention with research and education. Core issues are to deliver a complete multidisciplinary care of high quality and stimulate translational cancer research. The goal is to innovate the cancer care. The increasing problem of critical mass will be solved by networking comprehensive cancer centres containing quality assured harmonized infrastructures. This will give Europe a new potential to extend the cancer research to areas not possible to cover by single centres.

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Cancer is recognised as a major health hazard worldwide and has become a leading challenge to medical science. In the EU, cancer places an increasing burden on our national health systems as its cost and harmful effects on our ageing societies keep rising. It is now being widely recognised that cancer will not be combated effectively unless all scientific, medical, political and financial resources available in the Member States are brought together so as to tackle the overall cancer problem with maximum impact.

At present, there are no mechanisms in place in the EU to channel such competences and resources in a multi-national and multi-disciplinary context where fragmentation prevails. The cancer centres and institutes across the EU, in view of the extent of the problem they face, are seeking synergies and developing new forms of cooperation to fight cancer. As a step

in this direction, cancer institutions have created, in Brussels, the OEI-EEIG, an open non-governmental, non-profit, European-wide membership association which can help them to work together to fight cancer better and faster. The OEI is the instrument that the EU cancer research and care communities have given themselves to fill gaps in cancer management, to exchange and bring together viewpoints on cancer research and treatment and to pool resources to develop, propose and implement optimal, affordable solutions to cancer.

It is at the institutional level that cancer can and must be fought, because it is where the main elements of cancer research and clinical treatment are integrated and controlled. The institutions have direct access to a wealth of scientific and medical resources which often need to be pooled if they are to be fully exploited. The OEI can tap knowledge,

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know-how, competences and other resources from all over the EU and believes strongly that it has a key role to play as a driving force for the development of solutions to cancer. OECI is the organisation which has responsibility for the total repertoire of disciplines in cancer, research and education.

Cancer research in the EU is producing valuable results, which enable the implementation of new diagnostic methods and treatments in routine care and have an enormous potential to improve the life of the patient. Yet, research results are not being exploited as systematically and as fast as desirable. The 'time from bench to bedside' is too long, and improving the speed of innovation is one of the objects of translational medicine. For the OECI, integration of care, research and education is fundamental.

The OECI promotes a vision of oncology built on the holistic view of the patient and on an integrated model of the cancer research-to-care process. A strategic goal is to identify the requirements that define the 'Comprehensive Cancer Centre', the EU-model of a cancer institution that has all competences and resources to 'best' decrease mortality and morbidity and increase survival and quality of life of the patient.

The cancer institutions support the view that better cancer management requires the integration of prevention, care, research, development and education. A Comprehensive Cancer Centre would achieve the necessary level of integration to 'best' meet the needs of the patient by combining all necessary infrastructures, systems, resources and competences. In different EU countries a variety of organisational structures can be found; sometimes all modalities within one institution, and in other cases parts of the activities, take place in an integrated network.

The National Cancer Institute in the US has developed a accreditation methodology for its cancer centres. The differences between the US and EU health systems are such that an analogous but modified methodology must be developed

to be applicable to the EU centres. The OECI is currently adapting the methodology and conducting a pilot 'accreditation' project with a few centres using the resulting criteria and methodology. This project is being conducted in collaboration with the professional associations ESMO (the European Society of Medical Oncology), ESTRO (European Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology), and ECCO (European Cancer Organisation) and with the EORTC (the European Organisation of Research and Treatment of Cancer). An accreditation methodology, with the aim to increase quality and innovation, will be available in 2008.

The OECI is the only organisation which can pull together the competences of cancer research and care institutions from all over the EU to progress, on a consensual basis, a comprehensive model of oncology that can include prevention and care, research and education, laboratory and clinical practice. Through its institutional members, the OECI has access to and can pool the infrastructures, systems and other resources that are necessary for modern cancer research and care and that can be used to pilot, test and assess new concepts and methods. OECI offers a solution for the problem of critical mass in cancer research.

It is an enormous undertaking to try and bring the main EU cancer actors together, at the appropriate level, so as to develop a common strategy and better solutions for tackling cancer and reducing its toll on our society. The OECI approach appears as probably the only viable and acceptable alternative to enhance cancer research and care across the EU, and the OECI intends to pursue this approach, with the support of its members and, hopefully, with the help of additional public funding.

Conflict of interest statement

None declared.