## EHFG 2013: GREAT ADVANCES IN CANCER TREATMENT, BUT GAPS IN ACCESS TO THERAPIES

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*There has been great progress made in treating and curing cancer patients in recent decades, but still not all patients have been able to benefit from these advances, experts said at the European Health Forum Gastein. The global cancer burden has doubled over the last 25 years and is set to double again before 2030.*

**Bad Hofgastein, 4 October 2013** – The considerable individual and societal burden of cancer and the importance for policy makers to actively addressing the challenges in cancer were topics on the agenda of the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG). Close to 3.5 million new cases of cancer are diagnosed in the EU member states every year, and experts estimate that the disease accounts for 1.75 million deaths per year in the region.[1]

“Resilient and Innovative Health Systems for Europe” is the slogan for this year's EHFG. More than 550 participants from some 45 countries are attending Europe's most important health policy conference in Bad Hofgastein to exchange views on key issues affecting European health systems.

“The global cancer burden has doubled over the last 25 years and is set to double again before 2030, making prioritizing a robust and future focused management strategy essential to meet the demands of tomorrow”, said Prof Peter Boyle, President of the International Prevention Research Institute (iPRI), presenting iPRI’s State of Oncology 2013 report [2] at the EHFG. “Great advances have been made in managing cancer patients in recent decades, but there is still a long way to go. We face significant future challenges globally owing to growing inequalities both globally and nationally in access to diagnostics and treatment, a growing and ageing population, rapidly increasing incidence in the developing world and increasing survival bringing about their own burden to healthcare systems.”

Taking into account demographic changes and factoring in a yearly increase in cancer incidence of 1%, the State of Oncology 2013 report states, it could be expected that by 2030 there will be approximately 26.4 million incident cases of cancer and 17.0 million cancer deaths a year worldwide.

Cancer was important from many perspectives, but the economic importance should not be underestimated, experts underlined at the EHFG. Cancer costs the European Union 126 billion euros annually, according to an estimate of the economic burden of malignancies, recently published by Oxford researcher Dr Ramin Luengo-Fernandez and colleagues. Averaged across the European Union population, cancer represents an annual healthcare cost of 102 euros per EU citizen. Productivity losses and informal care account for 41% and 18% of cancer costs, respectively.

“There has been great progress made in treating and curing cancer patients in recent decades. Among the success stories are the treatment of testicular cancer, breast cancer, GIST tumours and chronic myeloid leukaemia where cure has been established for many patients”, Prof Boyle said. “Importantly, due to advances in treating and improving survival in advanced disease, there are more and more people with advanced cancer who are living longer and longer with a good quality of life.”

But not every patient with treatable and curable disease had been able to benefit from such successful treatments, Prof Boyle cautioned. “These disparities in cancer care, and hence cancer outcome, are increasingly apparent and increasingly unacceptable in modern society. Providing rapid diagnosis and treatment at affordable costs for all cancer patients in the world is a major challenge. The sophisticated therapies in development offer great potential for progress to accelerate.”

“Every population and cancer patient has the right to the best care available. The menu is to prevent those cancers that can be prevented; to treat those cancers that can be treated; to cure those cancers that can be cured; and to provide palliation wherever this is required,” Prof Boyle added.

[1] <http://www.i-pri.org/oncology2013/>
[2] <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959804913000075>

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