

Pancreatic cancer represents a major challenge, say MEPs

Written by Philippe de Backer, Françoise Grossetête, Philippe Juvin and Daciana Sârbu on 13 November 2014 in Opinion
Opinion

The EU must take urgent action on pancreatic cancer, argue Philippe de Backer, Françoise Grossetête, Philippe Juvin and Daciana Sârbu.



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Pancreatic cancer represents a critical public health challenge for which the EU institutions, together with the member states, must take urgent measures. Survival rates for all major cancers have improved markedly in the last 20 years, but pancreatic cancer represents a big exception.

It is currently the fourth deadliest cancer in Europe. More than 95 per cent of patients affected by pancreatic cancer die from the disease and by 2020 it will be the second greatest cause of death from cancer, next to breast cancer.

Together we have decided to call on the EU institutions and the member states to reverse this death rate trend by improving national data collection systems in order to help researchers to better

monitor the disease and find new treatments.

Pancreatic cancer should become a research priority, particularly in flagship programmes such as the innovative medicines initiative or Horizon 2020. Research can help bridge the knowledge gap and develop new treatments.

Prevention and early diagnosis should also be encouraged and prioritised in national cancer plans and health awareness programmes, particularly as pancreatic tumours can be surgically removed if detected at an early stage.

While many risk factors are related to lifestyle, with tobacco use, obesity, and diabetes playing an important role, the genetic element of pancreatic cancer is also highly significant. Identifying all the genes responsible remains a challenge, but is essential in order to develop targeted screening programmes which could save lives.

We need a more intense research effort into hereditary factors and a reduction of known risk factors such as smoking and obesity. We must complement this with increased training and education for Europe's healthcare professionals. These measures should be supported by the EU's health programme and would make a huge impact in the fight against this deadly disease.

Despite the urgent need for action, pancreatic cancer is one of the few cancers which fails to receive political attention and this must change. Pancreatic cancer needs to be prioritised in public health policies at both European and national level.

Cancer does not stop at national borders and cancer patients from across Europe are facing similar problems. These difficulties can often be resolved, or at least be influenced, by decisions taken at EU level. There is much to be done.

About the author

Philippe de Backer, Françoise Grossetête, Philippe Juvin and Daciana Sârbu are MEP champions for the European parliament call to action on pancreatic cancer

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