

Why isn't cancer talked about more?

Written by Pavel Poc on 2 February 2018 in Opinion
Opinion

Despite being the deadliest disease in the EU, cancer does not receive enough attention, says Pavel Poc.



Pavel Poc | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

The objective of World Cancer Day is to raise awareness about a global issue that deserves our attention but is not receiving it. Why does the EU's deadliest disease need promotion?

One would assume its constant presence in people's lives would make it a part of our daily discussions, a topic of the highest political priority.

Terrorist attacks, murders or deaths caused by consumer products all make the front pages of mainstream newspapers; we've all seen these topics leading on primetime TV.

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They're important issues, of course, but what about media coverage of cancer?

Out of every 100,000 EU citizens, one person dies due to consumer products, 0.85 are victims of homicide and 0.027 die in terrorist attacks. Cancer kills 265 people, yet the media is mostly silent.

Where is the media proportionality? What is the reason for this?

Cancer has become boring for the media. It is not a question of who we should blame - the media, for failing its civil responsibility, or society, for only being interested in new, unusual brutalities. Either way, it's simpler if the media just steps up.

From my work, I know some types of cancer are very common, such as colorectal cancer, and can be prevented if diagnosed early enough - in other words, if effective screening programmes are in place. For this to work you need the compliance of informed people. The key word here is "informed".

Then there are other types of cancer, such as that of the pancreas, where prevention is extremely difficult. Where other patient organisations usually have time to work, raise awareness among people about a healthy lifestyle and call on politicians to fund more research, this is not the case for pancreatic cancer.

Patients simply die too quickly to engage effectively and to drive the needed activities. This year, pancreatic cancer will become the third-highest leading cause of cancer-related death in the EU, yet it receives less than two per cent of all EU cancer research funding.

World Cancer Day is an opportunity to raise these issues, to think about and act on these calls. To conclude, I call on the media to give as much attention to cancer as they do to other major global issues. I also encourage every individual to take a few extra minutes to read a flyer they get on the street from an anti-cancer activist, or not to throw away an invitation from their insurance company or GP to a cancer prevention screening.

About the author

Pavel Poc (S&D, CZ) is a Vice-Chair of Parliament's MEPs against cancer group

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