

Towards a Europe free of cancers

Written by Alojz Peterle on 29 May 2018 in Opinion
Opinion

It is important to remember that cancer is more than a medical problem dealt with by patients and doctors, it is also a political and social problem, writes Alojz Peterle.



Alojz Peterle | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

The European Week Against Cancer (EWAC) takes place between 25 and 31 May each year, concluding with World No Tobacco Day. It is a time to increase communication and raise awareness of one of the most challenging diseases touching nearly all families in Europe. The EWAC encourages individuals and organisations to take action to ultimately achieve a Europe free of cancers.

The 2014-2019 legislature has been the busiest yet for the MEPs Against Cancer (MAC) interest group. We have met countless times to discuss access to cancer screening, early diagnosis and treatment and the use of glyphosate in agriculture, among many other topics.

We have also raised a number of issues that deserve greater attention, such as primary prevention related to the lifestyle messages mentioned in the European code against cancer, patient-centred care or the risk of sunbeds.

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Last year, my colleagues began to focus on establishing similar focus cross-party groups in national and local parliaments.

Over the past decade, thanks to increasing access to early diagnosis and more effective cancer treatments, Europe has made significant advances in term of cancer survivorship, pushing a considerable number of cancers into the category of chronic diseases.

Nevertheless, large geographical discrepancies in the EU remain when it comes to access to cancer diagnosis and medicines, as well as the quality of cancer care. Patients in Romania receive nowhere near the same level of services as patients in Denmark. To tackle such inequalities, quality data assessment concentrating on patient outcomes is needed to be able to measure and address challenges and to share and implement best practices.

The launch of the European cancer information system (ECIS) this March was a major step forward. However, there is still much to be done in improving data coverage and interoperability of national cancer registries and in digitalising healthcare generally.

Cancer is more than a medical problem dealt with by patients and doctors. It is also a political and social problem, one which has a huge influence on the future of Europe.

To ensure that 20 years from now, there will be no more cancer deaths, the EPP issued a position paper on 25 April calling for more European action in the entire cancer pathway, from prevention to palliative care. Prevention, for instance, has long been a political slogan, but it is not yet a targeted policy. We must start thinking about prevention in economic terms.

This paper calls for increased public funding in cancer research and supports timely implementation of the Commission's legislative proposal on European cooperation in the health technology assessment (HTA), to ease government's decisions on investment in high-value medicines. We need to concentrate on what matters to patients to improve their quality of life and enable them to return to their normal lives.

Another development at EU level was the launch of a new cancer joint action (JA) on innovative partnership action against cancer in April. This addresses outstanding issues not included in previous cancer JAs.

I encourage my fellow MEPs and policymakers at national level to support its work in developing innovative approaches to advances in cancer control in the areas of cancer prevention, genomics, cancer information and registries, cancer care, innovative cancer treatments and governance of

integrated cancer control, and a new analysis of national cancer control plans.

About the author

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