EU clinical cancer research needs ‘radical rethink’, summit hears

Written by Martin Banks on 16 September 2019 in Event Coverage
Event Coverage

A high-level health conference has been told that a "radical rethink" is needed on clinical cancer research across Europe.

The European Cancer Summit in Brussels heard that "much more" is needed to ensure the highest quality care is available.

But, while the healthcare sector needs to "change track" this does not necessarily mean the creation of "another" EU agency, the event was told.

The session on Saturday, the last day of a three-day summit, was moderated by Dr Denis Lacombe,
director of the European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC) and Roger Wilson, a sarcoma cancer survivor and patient advocate.

Opening the session, Dr Lacombe, who has 35 years of experience as a medical practitioner, noted that while science was evolving at an “unprecedented” pace, the traditional emphasis on value for money and pricing remain “central” issues.

He said that from 2009-2013, 48 new cancer drugs were approved but that studies suggested there was no “added benefit” resulting from many of them.

This suggests, he said, that there was a need for those involved in clinical trials to rethink how “we do things.”

“This is not necessarily an easy debate for us to have, but there is a need to adapt. We have to remember that value and pricing are central when it comes to patient access to treatment” Dr Denis Lacombe, EORTC

He added, "I realise this is not necessarily an easy debate for us to have, but there is a need to adapt. We have to remember that value and pricing are central when it comes to patient access to treatment."

He pointed to a "manifesto" adopted by several MEPs which calls for more "effective" cancer control in Europe.

With more than 3.7m new cancer cases and 1.9m deaths each year, such efforts were needed more than ever.

Dr Magda Chlebus, Executive Director of Science Policy at the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA), spoke of what is required to make “treatment optimisation” a reality.

She said, “There is so much more that we could be doing and that includes better exploiting what we already do.”

“There is so much more that we could be doing and that includes better exploiting what we already do” Dr Magda Chlebus, EFPIA

Dr Chlebus, who helps the healthcare industry to accelerate innovation, added, “There are no easy
solutions to this, not least as there are conflicts of interest, but the fact that we are here today debating this is positive.”

“What I think is needed are shorter and more relevant clinical trials so as to ensure they are fit for purpose.”

Another speaker, Dr Ralf Herold, Scientific Officer at the European Medicines Agency (EMA), stressed he was speaking in a personal capacity but said he wanted to see clinical trials that are more “informative and supportive” of treatment optimisation.

The session also heard from Marcus Guardian, Chief Operating Officer at the European Network for Health Technology Assessment (EUNETHA) and Jo de Cock, Chief Executive Officer at the National Institute of Health and Disability Insurance, Belgium.

Guardian said, “It is important to have dialogue like this summit. Optimisation is the buzzword here, but it has to mean something and the HTA has to be part of any discussions in this field.”

“It is important to have dialogue like this summit. Optimisation is the buzzword here, but it has to mean something and the HTA has to be part of any discussions in this field”

**Marcus Guardian, EUNETHA**

De Cock was among those who ruled out the creation of another EU agency to address the issue of better clinical trials, saying, “that is definitely not the answer.”

Instead, he argued, there should be more focus on the European Reference Networks, adding, “we need to put more energy - and investment - in the ERNs.”

The session was told how precision oncology and new approaches to clinical trials are rapidly changing the way practitioners in the research environment think.

Speakers also reflected on the role of data in driving change and improvement in research, plus the remaining obstacles to more meaningful exchanges.

They also reflected on existing clinical cancer research across Europe and the potential for improvement.

“Patient involvement of all kinds at all levels is invaluable and important. The focus, looking forward, has to be on what will benefit cancer patients, both in the short and long term” **Roger Wilson, cancer survivor and patient advocate**

Cancer survivor Roger Wilson brought the debate to a close by agreeing on the need for a “radical new approach” to clinical trials and research.

Wilson, who said he had been diagnosed 20 years ago and had since suffered six recurrences of his cancer, said, “Research should not be an end in itself and researchers need to remember this.”

“Patient involvement of all kinds at all levels is invaluable and important. The focus, looking forward, has to be on what will benefit cancer patients, both in the short and long term.”

The event was organised by the European CanCer Organisation, or ECCO.
About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

Tags
Health [6]
Justice and Rights [7]
Research and Innovation [8]

Categories
eHealth [9]
Health and social care [10]
Science, technology and research [11]
Dods events


Partnership events

The Health and Care Innovation Expo Civil Service Live Civil Service Awards Chief Nursing Officer for England's Summit Women into Leadership The Youth Justice Convention Socitm Spring Conference NHSCC Annual Members' Event Dods at Party