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The European Cancer Patient's Bill of Rights

A Catalyst for Change Addressing Inequalities in Cancer in Europe

A unique group of patient advocacy organisations, healthcare leaders (including two former health ministers and a Nobel Laureate) and Members of the European Parliament against Cancer (MAC) came together to launch the European Cancer Patient's Bill of Rights to coincide with World Cancer Day, in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. The result of over two years of work and widespread engagement, the initiative is led by the European Cancer Concord (ECC) and is a call to action to address the significant disparities that exist for European cancer patients today.

Three patient-centred principles (termed Articles) underpin the European Cancer Patient's Bill of Rights:

- Article 1: The right of every European citizen to receive the most accurate information and to be proactively involved in his/her care.
- Article 2: The right of every European citizen to optimal and timely access to appropriate specialised care, underpinned by research and innovation.
- Article 3: The right of every European citizen to receive care in health systems that ensure improved outcomes, patient rehabilitation, best quality of life and affordable healthcare.

"This increasing cancer burden will impact not only on patients and their families, but will also be a significant issue for healthcare systems and for the future economic competitiveness of Europe," said Prof Patrick Johnston, Co-Chair of ECC and Dean of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences at Queen's University Belfast, UK.

"We are proud that this Bill of Rights represents the input of oncology and patient advocacy leaders from 17 European countries representing over 1,000 national organisations and many millions of cancer patients and survivors in Europe", added Prof Mark Lawler, ECC Project Lead, based at Queen's University Belfast. "Launching the Bill of Rights at the European Parliament on World Cancer Day represents a clear indication of our will to focus attention on the unequal nature of cancer care in Europe, to engage and influence political representatives and most crucially to empower every European citizen to use the Bill of Rights as a catalyst to achieve effective change in cancer care delivery in their own country/region" he added.

In Europe, in 2012, 3.45 million people were diagnosed with cancer with 1.75 million cancer deaths, representing 3 deaths every minute from this killer disease. In 28 of the 53 European countries, cancer has replaced cardiovascular disease as the leading cause of premature death. In addition, the exponential ageing of the population means that unless effective preventive and treatment strategies are put in place, one person will die from cancer every 10 seconds. Significant differences in cancer incidences and mortalities are evident within Europe, reflecting inequalities in access to optimal cancer care between different national cancer healthcare systems. Cancer is cited as a prime example of increasing disparities between and within countries in Europe in the recent "Health in Europe" series in The Lancet.

One in three people die of this deadly disease. Cancer knows no boundaries, affecting all sectors of society. Thus, despite individual constituencies, the launch of the European Cancer Patient's Bill of Rights demonstrates that one must compete, not with each other, but against the common enemy: Cancer.

European Cancer Concord (ECC) is a patient-centred initiative, born out of the need to deliver an optimal standard of cancer care and research for Europe's citizens. Strengthening and upholding the rights of the individual cancer patient/ cancer survivor are its guiding principles. ECC was formed 2 years ago under the stewardship of the Society for Translational Oncology (STO).

ECC involves oncology and patient advocacy leaders from 17 European countries, who have come together in a unique partnership to address the inequalities in cancer care and research and to help develop effective solutions for European citizens and societies. To date, over 20 European and pan-European cancer Patient Advocacy Organisations (PAO), representing over 1,000 national organisations and many millions of cancer patients and survivors in Europe have become active partners.

For more information, please visit: <http://sto-online.org/european-cancer-concord>

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