

Access to cancer-treatment varies through EU

Access to cancer care, such as surgery, drugs and radiotherapy, the availability of anti-cancer drugs and medical training differ throughout the EU, states a study published by the European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) on 3 October 2006. Even access to information is said to vary from country to country.

The Medical Oncology Status in Europe survey has studied and compared countries, for example, on education and training, sub-specialisations of oncology, patterns of care, national guidelines on cancer and clinical research. The study does not provide for a clear ranking of the European countries on the matter, but shows that Iceland, Switzerland, Italy and Germany have the highest number of both oncologists and facilities as to their population size, whereas Eastern European nations have fewer specialist units.

"This is a failure for Europe," said the president of ESMO, Dr Hakan Mellstedt, referring to thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of unnecessary deaths each year due to lack of care.

Cancer is one of the biggest causes of death in Europe, and remains a major public-health concern. In 2004, 2 million new cases were detected and 1.2 million deaths reported. One in three Europeans is expected to be diagnosed with some form of cancer at some point in their lives. Commission recognises that Europe is characterised by unacceptable inequalities in cancer control and has for this reason launched several projects to create comparable indicators to monitor cancer.
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