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ESMO Forum for Empowering Patient Advocates

The European Society for Medical Oncology's (ESMO) annual forum was held in Brussels, Belgium under the auspices of the ESMO Cancer Patient Working Group, to bring together international cancer patient associations to encourage exchange of best practices, facilitate network-building amongst the groups and to provide the skills and techniques needed to develop and implement effective advocacy strategies.

The forum provides the platform for stakeholders to discuss shared issues, seen from different perspectives, and to come up with standard action plans essential for success. "Cancer patient organisations need to promote a common vision with all stakeholders before targeting the European institutions," recommends Adamos Adamou, a medical oncologist, MEP for Cyprus and Co-chair of the MEPs Against Cancer (MAC) group.

Advice on Interprofessional Cooperation

Heinz Ludwig, ESMO Cancer Patient Working Group, presented models for interprofessional cooperation, such as the ASCO-ESMO Consensus Statement on Quality Cancer Care and the annual ESMO Patient Seminars. He noted that "As a consequence of the fact that cancer care is multi-dimensional, collaboration is necessary." He added that we must "... train doctors to be better caregivers and engage patients in proactive and open communication with their doctors."

Doctors, patients and advocates must work together to create an ethical and human environment considering factors such as:

- Drug approval
- Reimbursement of drugs
- Patient rights
- Physician skills
- Information to patients
- Adequate funding

Much discussion also took place around how to implement needed changes in:

- Training and educating
- Quality control
- Putting pressure on healthcare systems
- Demanding higher standards
- Creating and implementing European cancer plans

Anita Waldman, Deutsche Leukaemie- und Lymphom-Hilfe, Germany summarised discussions about the doctor/patient relationship as well, saying "Medical support can be optimal in situations where social support is not adequate."

Media Relations Workshop

The ESMO Cancer Patient Advocacy Forum closed with Lynn Faulds-Wood, Bowel Cancer Campaign, UK, who gave a dynamic, interactive presentation with recommendations on how to get the attention of the media. She provided concrete examples and led a lively discussion where participants shared success stories. The importance of partnering with the media is not to be underestimated. Advocacy groups need to become media savvy as capturing media attention creates awareness and educates the general public about the disease.

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