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### Guest Editorial



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## Cancer

In 17 countries of the European Union, cancer has overtaken cardiovascular disease as the leading cause for premature death. In Europe in 2012, there were 3.75 million new cases of cancer, with 1.75 million deaths, equivalent to a cancer death every 20 seconds. Upward pressure on appropriate health spending and the needs of ageing populations need to be factored in, otherwise by 2050 we will face an epidemic of such proportions that in certain countries, a European citizen will die from cancer every five seconds.

The [European Cancer Patient Coalition \(ECPC\)](#) works to ensure that all European cancer patients have timely and affordable access to the best treatment and care available, throughout their life. Policymakers, researchers, doctors and industry should recognise European cancer patients as the most important partners in the fight against cancer and against all the cancer-related issues affecting our society.

One of the biggest struggles we face across Europe and one that all stakeholders in fighting cancer need to meet head on is disparity of care. The situation in Eastern Europe is particularly challenging, with mortality rates for many cancers above the European average. In Poland for example, lung cancer mortality is 83% while the EU average is 56.4%. In Romania, the mortality rate for cervical cancer is 14.2%, compared with an EU average of 3.7%. But there are also challenges for Western and Northern European nations. Studies such as the International Cancer Benchmarking Partnership (ICBP) have revealed that both the United Kingdom (UK) and Denmark have significantly poorer survival rates, particularly for lung, colorectal and ovarian cancers, when investigated with comparator nations Norway and Sweden (Coleman et al. 2011). In addition to the significant disparities between European nations, regional intra-country variations are also evident, leading to differences in survival within individual countries.

Our aims are simple: Empowerment of European cancer patients through the dissemination of fundamental information regarding cancer; fostering of cooperation among cancer patients' organisations through joint activities; ensuring that state-of-the-art cancer care practices are shared across the EU; making cancer a priority for action on the European health policy agenda; contributing to change or creating EU and national laws to satisfy cancer patients' needs; calling for research on survivorship issues and advocating for better healthcare and social services for them and, above all, having an active role in shaping European and national healthcare policies that impact on cancer patients. To this end we were instrumental in setting up the [European Cancer Patient's Bill of Rights \(BoR\)](#), launched in the European Parliament on World Cancer Day 2014. Developed by the European Cancer Concord (ECC), an equal partnership between patients, their advocates and cancer health professionals, the BoR is a catalyst for change which articulates the right of every European citizen to receive the most accurate information and be proactively involved in his or her care, to access optimal, timely and appropriate specialised care underpinned by research and innovation and to receive this care within health systems that ensure improved outcomes, patient rehabilitation, improved quality of life and affordable healthcare.

To strengthen the case for optimal and equitable patient care, ECPC launched the "[Europe of Disparities in Cancer](#)" initiative at the European Parliament in January 2015. This is especially critical for patients in countries where the healthcare system is being decimated by economic crisis. While increased spend does not always correlate with improved patient care we have to warn about the additional negative impact of austerity and cost containment measures in a number of European countries. For example, Greece, against EU recommendations, has reduced its screening programmes for breast and cervical cancer, risking an increase in undetected cancers that may lead to increases in mortality.

Patients are central to their cancer care, and for this reason we are advocating for the need for improved cancer health literacy, better patient-adapted information and support and improved access to cancer screening, early detection and treatments — both traditional and innovative. Immediate action is also needed in addressing shortages in cancer medicines, access to innovative treatment approaches, delays to approval, health technology assessment and cancer survivorship and patient rehabilitation.

We welcome [this issue of HealthManagement.org The Journal](#) for putting cancer and all of the issues surrounding this growing illness centre stage. With the disparities that we continue to face, both between countries and within countries, this may translate to a cancer death in certain parts of Europe every five seconds. We need to act now...

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