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World Cancer Day: European Oncologists Call for Equal Access to Cancer Treatment



Access to treatment and care is the fundamental right of any patient. In cancer, despite the fast rate of new agent development, there are still astounding inequalities in the availability of and accessibility to cancer medications across Europe, according to the European Society for Medical Oncology, which is leading a European Consortium Study on the availability and accessibility of anti-neoplastic medicines across Europe. On World Cancer Day 2015, the European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) confirms its commitment to acknowledging patient rights, and highlights ESMO's collaborative efforts towards improving access for all.

"While researchers are working hard to discover new cancer therapies, these are not always reaching the patient," said Rolf A. Stahel, ESMO President. "To address the issue of disparities in cancer care we first need to map out what the problems are and where they occur. One of them is the complex issue of access to medicines."

The European Consortium Study attempts to answer the question: Is a licensed medicine available to a patient when prescribed and can the patient afford it? Based on the perception and responses of country reporters, the answer is, 'not always'.

Speaking as a stage IV melanoma patient, Lori Murdock said: "First you are told that your mole is nothing to worry about, then you are told it is going to kill you; and then, we have a drug that could help but you are not going to get it."

The preliminary results of the ESMO survey were presented at the ESMO 2014 Congress in Madrid last year, and showed discrepancies mainly based on the geographic location of the patient, the high cost of medicines to patients and the unavailability of cancer medicines in a country. The data is currently being peer-reviewed and publication of the final results is due later this year. The international arm will be launched in mid-2015.

Commenting on the interim findings, Oncologist Professor, Nathan Cherny, Chair of Humanistic Medicine at Shaare Zedek Medical Centre, Jerusalem, Israel, lead author of the study on behalf of ESMO, said: "Once the study is published, our follow-up actions will be twofold --to bring together European stakeholders to help reduce these discrepancies, and to take the study to the international level, giving us a greater global view which can only be beneficial in the long-term to patients."

Bettina Ryll, Chair of the ESMO Cancer Patient Working Group and Founder of the Melanoma Patient Network Europe said: "It is tragic that patients have to battle not just with their disease but also with the barriers to access the medication they need to treat it."

Alexandru Eniu, Head of the Day Hospital Unit, Department of Breast Tumours, Chircuta Cancer Institute, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, study co-author on behalf of the ESMO Emerging Countries Committee, states: "Medical oncologists treat patients according to the evidence-based ESMO Clinical Practice Guidelines, but they can only do so as long as the medicines recommended in the guidelines are readily available in their countries."

Eniu added: "Data from the ESMO survey will also be valuable for the World Health Organization (WHO) to understand the availability of those cancer medicines on the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines. As part of ESMO 'official relations status' partnership with the WHO, we will work with the WHO and also support the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) to promote access for all cancer patients to essential cancer medicines, and those required to treat their individual disease."

Source: [European Society for Medical Oncology](#)

Image source: World Cancer Day.org

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