

ESE Statement following the publication of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan

The European Society of Endocrinology (ESE) welcomes the European Commission Beating Cancer Plan, presented on 3rd of February 2021, ahead of World Cancer Day. A strong focus on cancer and holistic approach is needed to make a difference for the many people and their families suffering from this disease. The Beating Cancer Plan touches upon many of ESE's key priorities, including the important areas of activity below.

The Commission has identified obesity as an independent risk factor for many cancers

"Cancer risk is heightened by the joint effects of unhealthy diets, obesity, and physical inactivity." (p.10)

ESE applauds the European Commission for acknowledging the strong link between cancer, obesity and nutrition. Obesity over the lifetime is a health concern of epidemic proportion with a major impact on cancer prevalence. We would encourage the Commission to maintain and strengthen this focus on childhood and adult obesity as one of the key health challenges of our time. Officially recognising obesity as a disease would help further stimulate action. ESE supports the adoption of an ambitious framework to address childhood (and adult) obesity in the form of a strategy or renewed action plan that supports the Member States in their efforts at the national level.

The action plan will integrate the rare-cancer focused European Reference Networks (ERNs)

"The EU Network will be underpinned by the integration of the existing four rare-cancer focused European Reference Networks (ERNs) and a group of newly-created Reference Networks." (p.17)

The attention given to ERNs and the important role they play in driving Europe's fight against rare cancers is a positive step. In addition to expanding the rare-cancer focused ERN network, ESE would also encourage the allocation of funds to existing (endocrine) ERNs to enhance their potential in terms of cancer prevention, treatment and quality of life.

The Commission has recognised chemicals with hazardous properties as a key factor in the cancer challenge

"Chemicals with hazardous properties can be harmful to the environment and human health, causing cancers, and affecting the immune, respiratory, endocrine, reproductive and cardiovascular system. Weakening of the human immune system increases the vulnerability to diseases, including cancer, and reduces the body's capacity to respond to vaccines." (p. 11)

The Commission should pay particular and explicit attention to Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs) in this context, since there is an established link to cancer, including breast and testicular cancer, and they can lead to obesity, which is a cancer risk factor. EDCs and other chemicals with hazardous properties are an area for immediate action of the European Union, who has a clear competence on chemical substances. The precautionary principle must be upheld, and best-available science applied.

Quality of life for cancer survivors

"In this context, we should no longer focus on 'how long' people live after diagnosis, but rather on 'how well and how long' they live." (p.21)

Next to social considerations, 'how well' should include the endocrine health implications of cancer treatment. Particularly young cancer patients need clarity on treatment regarding fertility and a healthy life as cancer survivors.

The action plan proposes digitalisation of cancer data to stimulate research, diagnosis and treatment

“The European Cancer Imaging Initiative will be set up in 2022 to develop an EU ‘atlas’ of cancer-related imaging. [...] Furthermore, the European Cancer Information System, which monitors the burden of cancer in Europe, will be expanded as of 2021. It will include new indicators detailed also by cancer staging, and a new section on childhood cancers.” (p.6)

ESE welcomes the strong focus on the digitalisation of cancer data to stimulate research in this area and to improve detection and treatment. For endocrine cancers, late detection is a real concern as exemplified by Neuroendocrine tumours (NETs), which are only detected at a late stage in more than 60% of cases. This significantly impacts treatment outcomes.

ESE also supports the European Commission in its ambitious endeavour to reduce tobacco use to less than 5% of the population by 2040 and to tackle the immense inequalities in cancer care in between EU countries and regions.

ESE looks forward to discussing the Beating Cancer Plan with EU decision makers in more detail and to support the plan in achieving its objectives.

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