

SUMMARY

Third annual summit Greece's agenda to combat cancer

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The event was organised under the auspices of the Hellenic Society of Medical Oncology (HeSMO), gathering exceptional speakers from Greece and abroad who focused –among others– on key issues related to **Europe's Beating Cancer Plan**, the **agenda against cancer** in Greece, the **role of patients** in cancer policy shaping, the **reduction of inequalities, national cancer strategy**, the culture of **prevention, early diagnosis** and **biomarker testing**, the **future of cancer**, as well as **digitalisation, data** and **technology** in cancer care.



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Stella Kyriakides

European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety

In the space of two years, Europe's Beating Cancer Plan has taken the form of concrete initiatives with significant financial support, said **Stella Kyriakides**, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety in a message sent on the occasion of the Economist Impact 3rd Annual Summit, which focused on Greece's Agenda to Combat Cancer. The differences in screening from country to country in the EU are huge; nonetheless, she noted that we are working on eliminating them. The Commissioner stressed that a total of six types of cancer, accounting for 50% of all cancer cases, are now screened for in the EU. Regarding Greece, Ms Kyriakidou pointed out that discrepancies throughout the country are still a barrier to high-quality cancer care. The Commissioner concluded that we can only succeed if we build our efforts around the perspective of the patient. ●



Thanos Plevris

Minister of Health
Greece

Health Minister of Greece **Thanos Plevris**, in his opening remarks during the 3rd Annual Summit on Greece's Agenda to Combat Cancer, assessed that we will face an upsurge in cancer cases in Greece and the rest of Europe, clarifying that this will have been caused by the failure to carry out the required tests during the pandemic. In this context, the Minister stressed the importance of prevention, accurate and timely diagnosis, appropriate treatment and overall survival. As he recalled, in Greece there are three prevention programmes running simultaneously for the first time. The first free mammograms in public hospitals have detected early-stage tumours in 6,113 women. Mr Plevris also referred to hospital care while highlighting the need for access to innovative treatments. Additionally, the minister spoke of a holistic framework for home care and the legislative framework on palliative care. He also described the contribution of the EU Recovery Fund to the establishment of a Greek Childhood Cancer Registry as paramount. "We aspire that children born in our country from 2025 onwards will never smoke in their lives," said Mr Plevris, concluding that the country yearns to achieve the European goals for cancer treatment, including eliminating certain types of it. ●



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Mina Gaga

Alternate minister of Health
Greece

Cancer is the biggest pandemic of this century, alternate minister of Health of Greece **Mina Gaga** said during her speech at the Economist Impact's 3rd Annual Summit on Cancer, adding that priority must be given to prevention, which means firstly good health education and information, starting from school. Moreover, screening which should not only be about performing tests but also their proper assessment, the alternate minister pointed out. She further stressed the need to define and facilitate the patient pathway transition all the way from primary to tertiary care, if needed, and from diagnosis to treatment and supportive care. Greece has a substantial private sector; still, the public sector should also expand its operation, e.g. in terms of operating hours, which must be extended so that patients have choices, Ms Gaga said. In addition, she stressed the importance of oncology councils as well as telemedicine, which is vital for an island country like Greece. The alternate minister also emphasised the importance of cooperation with patient associations and the need for cancer policy to be unconditionally supported by all political parties. ●



Mary Bussell

Manager health policy and insight
Economist Impact
Lead, The Vaccine Ecosystem Initiative

Worldwide, 1 in 5 people will receive a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime, **Mary Bussell**, manager of health policy and insight, Economist Impact and head of The Vaccine Ecosystem Initiative, said during her opening statement. According to the figures she provided, in 2020 there were 19.3 million new cancer cases worldwide, an increase from 14 million new cases in 2012. She highlighted inequalities in cancer treatment, accentuated further by the covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, Mary Bussell underscored the importance of strengthening partnerships and collaboration among global, European and national stakeholders to ensure meaningful dialogue and the development of straightforward and easy-to-implement policies in the post-pandemic era. In terms of prevention, the Economist representative noted that 30-50% of cancers are preventable, stressing that early detection is the strongest driver to achieve this. Ms Bussell referred to technological innovations, which –as she explained– need to be carefully integrated into health systems in ways that meet the needs of people living with cancer as well as health professionals. “Cancer must be a priority and should be at the top of every country's agenda. The costs of inaction –both in terms of human lives and the sustainability of health systems– are too high to ignore,” The Economist's representative concluded. ●



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Zenia Saridaki-Zoras

Medical oncologist
Director, 1st Oncology Department
Metropolitan Hospital
President of the BoD
Hellenic Society of Medical Oncology
(HeSMO)

“One cannot offer better oncology unless one is properly trained,” pointed **Zenia Saridaki-Zoras**, medical oncologist and president of the BoD of the Hellenic Society of Medical Oncology (HeSMO) during the Economist’s 3rd Annual Summit on Greece’s agenda to combat cancer. Ms Saridaki highlighted the importance of education in the field of oncology. Referring to the initiatives of HeSMO, she made special mention of the training course upgrading in cooperation with the Open University. “We invest in education utilising scholarships and research projects,” she noted and welcomed the initial actions taken in establishing a cancer patient registry, which, as she explained, is achievable thanks to the digital transformation of the country. At the same time, Ms Saridaki pointed out the importance of continuous updating of the biomarkers related to the prescription and reimbursement of oncology drugs. Referring once again to the work of HeSMO, she assured that it would offer continued support using its own resources and sponsorships from the pharmaceutical industry and other programmes. In recent years, more than €5.5 million have been allocated to 21 mutation and molecular alteration detection programmes, whereas more than 4,500 oncology patients have been tested free of charge, she noted. ●



Nikos Dedes

Chair
Greek Patients’ Association

The Greek Patients’ Association chair **Nikos Dedes** underlined the need for a comprehensive health strategy. On the occasion of the tragic train accident at Tempí, Mr Dedes attached particular importance to establishing non-partisan national priorities, pointing out that we need to rise to the occasion and promote partnerships to tackle the problems in the health sector. By way of example, he pointed out that 1/5 of Greeks report unmet medical needs, which translates into either expensive medicines, access difficulties, or delays in medical care. Mr Dedes added, inter alia, that there are many things yet to be done, mainly because we have not entirely eradicated smoking and obesity. “We need to do quite a lot, such as the cancer registry, for instance, which we have been hearing about for years but we have not seen yet,” he said. ●



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Cyril Schiever

Senior vice president
President of Mid Europe region
MSD

Taking the floor at the Economist Impact's 3rd Annual Summit on Greece's agenda to combat cancer, **Cyril Schiever**, senior vice president and president of the Mid Europe region of MSD, extolled the progress made in recent years in cancer treatment, citing as an example the significant drop in lung cancer mortality. Referring to a recent US study, Cyril Schiever called to mind that 1/3 of patients diagnosed and treated between 2016 and 2018 are still alive today, which, as he explained, was unthinkable a few years ago. Mr Schiever added that -among others- much has been done regarding access to innovative drugs and HPV prevention in boys and girls, while underlining the significance of diligently implementing the EU Beating Cancer Plan. As he pointed out, "it offers a complete framework on how to progress, whether it's in prevention, early diagnosis/ screening, early treatment or improved treatment rates, and in addressing the challenges around cancer care inequalities." Moreover, Mr Schiever talked about the need to measure what works, what doesn't work, our successes, and our failures. He added that we need to see if what we invest in is actually working, for it is necessary to ensure that innovation reaches patients. Mr Schiever stressed, "the more we have access to innovation in our countries, the more that innovation will eventually reach patients as fast as possible." ●



Laurent Louette

Director public affairs and country liaison
Vaccines Europe

Laurent Louette, the director of public affairs and country liaison of Vaccines Europe, spoke about the vision of building a Europe free of preventable cancers, announcing new EU recommendations for vaccine-preventable cancers in the coming months. Mr Louette referred in particular to national programmes and infrastructures designed to offer flexibility and free access to vaccination, with adequate and sustainable funding. In grouping the measures to be taken, the Vaccines Europe representative focused on the importance of developing appropriate actions for an effective response, combined with performance monitoring of vaccination programmes. He added that it is necessary to have adequate public health measures that can be swiftly implemented, such as educational programmes, vaccination campaigns and commitments from health professionals. Mr Louette also mentioned the difference between various countries regarding their performance in cancer prevention and treatment programmes, and emphasised the significance of using data to ensure that, in the long run, there are effective vaccines not only for HPV-related cancer but for other viruses too. ●



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Caroline Berchet

Health economist
OECD

Caroline Berchet, health economist at the OECD Health Division, focused on monitoring cancer inequalities in Europe. Based on 2019 data, the OECD representative said that cancer is the second leading cause of death, only topped by cardiovascular disease (CVD). Furthermore, cancer mortality rates in the EU are 75% higher among men compared to women. Ms Berchet also referred to diverging performance among countries, noting that it points to inequalities between men and women and between the more and the less educated. According to data she presented, cancer mortality is up to 2.5 times higher among patients with a low education level compared to those with a higher one. Speaking about what the healthcare system can do, Ms Berchet referred to prevention through investing in cancer prevention policies and policies that tackle inequalities in the healthcare sector. She also referred to accessibility, quality –by collecting, monitoring and benchmarking data– and resilience, by minimising any disruption to cancer screening, which, is key to reducing the number of undiagnosed cancer patients and improving their chances to survive. ●



Ioannis Boukovinas

Medical oncologist
Head of Bioclinic Oncology Unit
Thessaloniki

Inequalities are a choice we make, intentionally or unintentionally, depending on the priorities we set and the incentives we give health systems to develop, according to **Ioannis Boukovinas**, medical oncologist and head of the Bioclinic Oncology Unit in Thessaloniki, who also referred to regulatory barriers and the tendency of health policies to raise obstacles rather than propose solutions. According to Ioannis Boukovinas, precision oncology has magnified the inequality gap, citing as an example what it means for the healthcare system to transport a patient from an island to a large medical centre. Noting some of the country's negative top rankings, he said that –according to data– Greece is 25th out of 28 countries in all aspects of breast cancer treatment, from early diagnosis to palliative care. We have also clinched the top spot in terms of patients' lack of access to personal clinical data –surprising, but true, Mr Boukovinas added. He noted that countries with more robust economies can also offer their citizens the opportunity to live longer. “We need to develop a comprehensive national cancer plan and strategies for its implementation,” he noted. ●



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Merel Hennink

Patient advocate

Patient advocate **Merel Hennink** spoke about her personal experience. She was diagnosed with cancer in the Netherlands about a decade ago, in 2014, adding that she started a targeted treatment with excellent results. Through her personal experience she highlighted the challenges that cancer patients face and the importance of an organised health system that is supportive and instructive. Ms Hennink described, inter alia, how she sought proper treatment, noting the mistake committed by health professionals when asking lung cancer patients about smoking and the corresponding feelings of guilt “conferred” upon them. She stressed that the time of cancer diagnosis is not the time to blame patients for a harmful habit, explaining that many cancer patients feel remorse anyway. Merel Hennink also mentioned the importance of investing in research, noting that in the Netherlands patients become part of the process, being involved in preparing an overall plan for cancer treatment, thus promoting population awareness as well as collaboration between public and private sectors. ●



Evangelia Razis

Medical oncologist
Director, 3rd Oncology Department
“Hygeia” Hospital
Director, Contemporary Oncology Team

Of the country's lagging behind in more effective prevention and early diagnosis of cancer, improving the treatment of diagnosed cancer, as well as the state's response to the management of the disease and its consequences, spoke the medical oncologist, director of the 3rd Oncology Department of “Hygeia” Hospital and director of the Contemporary Oncology Team **Evangelia Razis**. “I felt ashamed,” she said, referring to her experience as an evaluator of cancer screening programmes. She also talked about the National Cancer Plan, whose primary goal is to help raise awareness that cancer is a chronic and often curable disease, as she said. However, Greece is lagging behind, and according to Ms Razis, the problem is mainly due to lack of awareness. She spoke in particular about the demographics and geography of Greece, noting that due to its having a large number of islands, it is necessary to implement an organised initiative to inform society, eliminate inequalities and increase both access to information and vaccination rates. She underlined that a lot of work remains to be done to eliminate disparities, inform stakeholders, and promote prevention. ●



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Anastasios Boutis

Consultant medical oncologist
1st Oncology Department
"Theagenio" Anticancer Hospital
Thessaloniki

Anastasios Boutis, consultant medical oncologist from "Theagenio" Anticancer Hospital of Thessaloniki, referred to Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, emphasising the necessity of drawing up a National Action Plan for cancer in Greece. In this context, he referred to the Hellenic Society of Medical Oncology proposal for a national action plan for lung cancer, with a 5-year plan to reduce new cases, increase survival rates and improve quality of life. According to Mr Boutis, this plan is based on prevention, early diagnosis and improved treatment management. He emphasised improving the framework for access to biomarker testing and new diagnostic methods and promoting clinical trials. The National Action Plan should include provision for palliative medicine, Anastasios Boutis stressed. In conclusion, he summarised the main points of the interdisciplinary effort for a national action plan, talked about the creation of a culture of cancer prevention, the strengthening of health literacy in the population, the implementation of a National Cancer Registry, ensuring equal access to innovative treatments, reimbursement for biomarker testing and the strengthening of collaborative efforts and the implementation of other strategic interventions. ●



Kostas Athanasakis

Assistant professor in Health Economics and Health Technology Assessment
Department of Public Health Policy
University of West Attica

"Today, we can have more patients than ever before who have won the battle against cancer, thanks to ongoing clinical research, new digital diagnostic tools and the implementation of screening programmes," according to **Kostas Athanasakis**, assistant professor in Health Economics and Health Technology Assessment from the Department of Public Health Policy, University of West Attica. The innovative treatment options available since 1991 have managed to reduce cancer mortality to date by 33%, he noted, describing the burden of cancer in Greece as extremely heavy, both in epidemiological terms and in terms of social cost. Kostas Athanasakis emphasised the need for efficient health system decisions to ensure the best possible health outcome for patients, the process of evaluating health technologies and the investment required by the state. Furthermore, he referred to the results of a study based on the HIP (Health Impact Projection) model, according to which the introduction of innovative treatments in five cancer types would, in just five years, increase the life years gained by 34%, offering oncology patients in Greece not only the opportunity to live longer but also to have a better quality of life. "The indirect cost of cancer could also be reduced by €260 million in five years," Mr Athanasakis added, stressing that health expenditure is not a cost but an investment. ●



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Dimitrios Papageorgiou

Assistant professor
University of Peloponnese
Head, Nurse Oncology Unit
Euroclinic Athens
President
Hellenic Oncology Nursing Society

The role of oncology nursing was the subject presented by **Dimitrios Papageorgiou**, assistant professor at the University of Peloponnese, head of the Nurse Oncology Unit, Euroclinic Athens and president of the Hellenic Oncology Nursing Society. He referred to the already existing specialisation and certification programmes for nurses, talking in more detail about the relevant educational and clinical tools, such as patient information booklets for those undergoing chemotherapy, immunotherapy, radiotherapy, etc. Dimitrios Papageorgiou also underlined the role and contribution of specialist nurses, among others, in prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, symptom management, patient education, pain management, palliative care, nutrition, ethical dilemmas management etc. ●



George Kapetanakis

President
Hellenic Cancer Federation (ELLOK)

The importance of a patient-centred/-people-centred strategy for cancer was emphasised by the president of the Hellenic Cancer Federation (ELLOK) **George Kapetanakis**, who noted that this approach is a one-way street for any oncology care system that wishes to provide high-quality services in response to contemporary challenges. He also stressed that the aim should be to transform the initially passive users of health services into active and co-responsible citizens participating in the decision-making process as regards their disease. The ELLOK president said that patient participation could address treatment preferences, access to optimal treatments, inequalities reduction, palliative care services and ethical issues. He further referred to the work of the Hellenic Cancer Federation, noting, among other things, that the federation has undertaken studies that identify gaps and inadequacies and propose solutions that will improve the outcome for cancer patients, contributing, at the same time, to the sustainability of the health system. Finally, Mr Kapetanakis concluded that the National Cancer Action Plan is a one-way street. ●



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Eirini Agapidaki

Secretary general of Public Health
Ministry of Health
Greece

The need to invest further in prevention, underlined **Eirini Agapidaki**, secretary general of Public Health of Greece, during her speech at the Economist Impact's 3rd Annual Summit on Cancer; she clarified that we cannot tackle health risks without such prevention. In this context, she highlighted that all relevant initiatives focus on three main pillars: a) primary prevention, focusing mainly on smoking, child obesity, etc.; b) secondary prevention, which relates to screening; c) structures and infrastructure, i.e. the public health system, for which Greece is preparing to implement a coherent framework in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO). "Our country is creating a well-organised prevention programme for the first time," underlined Ms Agapidaki. "We don't just focus on living longer; we care about having more years of healthy life," she concluded. ●



Amanda Psyrris

Professor of Medical Oncology
National and Kapodistrian University
of Athens
Chair, Nomination Committee
European Society of Medical Oncology
Chairman of Medicine
"Attikon" University Hospital

The outline of the new EU approach to cancer screening was given by **Amanda Psyrris**, professor of Medical Oncology at the National Kapodistrian University of Athens, chair of the Nomination Committee European Society of Medical Oncology and chairman of Medicine at "Attikon" University Hospital, in her recorded message during the conference. Among other things, she referred to breast cancer screening and mammogram recommendations for women between 50 and 69 years old. At the same time, she added, for women between the ages of 45 and to 74 years old, testing for the HPV virus is recommended to prevent cervical cancer. Ms Psyrris also spoke of the quantitative faecal immunochemical testing (FIT), which is recommended for colorectal cancer, while for lung cancer, the EU directive provides for screening, particularly for (former and current) smokers. Furthermore, PSA testing in combination with MRI is essential for prostate cancer diagnosis, while screening for Helicobacter pylori is indicated for gastric cancer, Amanda Psyrris stressed. ●



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Ilias Athanasiadis

Medical oncologist
Director of Oncology Clinic
Mitera Hospital

Taking the floor, **Ilias Athanasiadis**, medical oncologist and director of the Oncology Clinic at Mitera Hospital, praised the importance of prevention, which must be promoted in all countries, explaining that the gains from the process are much more significant than at any other stage of the disease. "There are inequalities, and therefore whatever we implement, we have to ensure it reaches the entire population," he stressed, while quoting various studies. Furthermore, Mr Athanasiadis referred to the use of artificial intelligence for precision measurements, which, he said, is being applied in Greece too, but so far at a pilot stage. Regarding individual types of cancers, Ilias Athanasiadis noted that we should have imaging testing to screen the entire population for breast cancer. In addition, for cervical cancer, he confirmed that there is an ongoing "war" to eradicate it. ●



Kristine Sørensen

Founder
Global Health Literacy Academy
President
International Health Literacy Association

Kristine Sørensen, founder of the Global Health Literacy Academy and president of the International Health Literacy Association, highlighted the need to foster a culture of compassion for people living with cancer and their families. Ms Sørensen said that we all have friends we have lost to the disease. "It really feels not like a rapid crash but a slow crash," she said, referring to the progression of the disease, adding that "we need to somehow build that compassion into the treatment, into the prevention strategies, into the curriculum and the training of healthcare professionals." Kristine Sørensen underlined that "starting at school, we need to ensure that we find a common language when we talk about cancer and give comfort to people who have cancer, their families and their wider environment". ●



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Nikolaos Tsoukalas

Medical oncologist
Director, Oncology Department
401 General Military Hospital
Vice-president of the BoD
Hellenic Society of Medical Oncology
(HeSMO)

Fifty per cent of cancers could have been prevented if we improved our lifestyle, estimated the medical oncologist, director of the Oncology Department at the 401 GMH and vice-president of the Hellenic Society of Medical Oncology (HeSMO) **Nikolaos Tsoukalas**, who insisted during his presentation on the value of prevention. Referring to primary prevention, he called for information campaigns for the general public to convince people to improve aspects of their lives, such as smoking or obesity. Of course, he added, there is also secondary prevention, which involves screening for early cancer. The vice president of HeSMO pointed out that there is no country where secondary prevention is perfect; however, he stressed that we need to find a way to invite people to get tested. ●



Flora Zagouri

Professor of Medical Oncology
School of Medicine
National and Kapodistrian University
of Athens

In recent years, many studies have shown that each tumour has unique characteristics, demonstrating the complexity of the disease, even in patients with the same type of cancer, according to **Flora Zagouri**, professor of Medical Oncology at the School of Medicine, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Now, she said, biomarker testing is increasingly used, with research revolutionising both diagnosis and treatment. As she explained, cancer biomarkers, i.e. biological molecules –DNA, RNA, proteins or other extracellular molecules– can be identified for various purposes:

- To assess a person's risk of developing cancer, with mutations in the BRCA genes being a typical example thereof
- To determine the risk of cancer recurrence
- To evaluate the likelihood of response to treatment
- To monitor disease progression and the response to treatment
- To predict resistance to treatment, such as with PIK3CA mutations, and response to new treatment options

According to Ms Zagouri, as we can now build a more comprehensive molecular profile of tumours using DNA, RNA and protein analysis and other tools, we can better understand the biology of each tumour, thus further increasing the personalisation of treatment options. ●



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Constantine Stratakis

Director, EDIMO & Human Genetics
and Precision Medicine
Institute for Molecular Biology
& Biotechnology (IMBB)
Foundation for Research & Technology
Hellas (FORTH), Heraklion, Greece

Professor **Constantine Stratakis**, director, EDIMO & Human Genetics and Precision Medicine, Institute for Molecular Biology & Biotechnology (IMBB), Foundation for Research & Technology Hellas (FORTH), focused on the expectations raised by the development of the Hellenic Network of Precision Medicine in molecular oncology. He spoke about the technological developments focusing on the discovery of biomarkers in the 1990s, with the completion of human genome sequencing. He also referred to the reduction of costs due to measuring genetic biomarkers and the contribution of related research to discovering genes predisposing to cancer development. Furthermore, Constantine Stratakis said a recent study using artificial intelligence revealed which genes were involved to a smaller extent in cancer development. To this end, he considered it essential for the Recovery and Resilience Fund to fund precision medicine. The Hellenic Network of Precision Medicine, established in June 2022, had its inaugural meeting on 1/7/2022 and is looking forward to receiving samples. As there are several modern laboratories in Greece, Mr Stratakis said he hopes that all oncology patients in the country will soon be able to go online and find on a website those biomarkers for which they need to be immediately tested. ●



Paraskevi Michalopoulou

President
Alma Zois

The president of Alma Zois **Paraskevi Michalopoulou** deems that almost every patient has a cancer very much their own, which is why treatment has turned to precision medicine. Taking the floor, Ms Michalopoulou explained that the combination of understanding genetic and environmental factors and lifestyle contributes to disease prevention and more effective care, noting that an approach targeting each patient's profile so as to make personalised decisions leads to better outcomes in prevention, diagnosis, treatment, survival and quality of life. She further added that this specific approach changes the patients' daily routine by acknowledging the physical and mental stress they go through when subjected to chemotherapy, especially when they do not receive the optimal treatment for their case. Moreover, precision treatment results in fewer side effects, less physical stress, fewer days of hospitalisation and nursing staff, fewer relapses, a better mental state, less impact on the patient's environment and a smaller financial burden for the patient, society and the health system, ultimately offering a longer and better quality of survival, underlined Ms Michalopoulou. ●



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Anastasios Gaitanis

Research scientist
Professor level
Clinical and preclinical PET/CT
Biomedical Research Foundation
of the Academy of Athens

Imaging plays a crucial role in cancer diagnosis and staging, noted **Anastasios Gaitanis**, professor level research scientist at the Biomedical Research Foundation of the Academy of Athens, who also highlighted the need to synchronise research for the discovery of genes that predispose to the development of cancer with the corresponding one of the pharma industry, in order to meet patients' specialised needs. He added that research teams worldwide aim to improve diagnosis by using radiomics features and mathematical parameters calculated on the image that can describe the size of the cancerous tumour or areas of normal tissue. He explained that these features can be combined with artificial intelligence applications in prognostic and predictive models, adding that radiogenomics is a combinatorial approach that holds great promise in cancer assessment. The goal of such an approach is to reveal, in a non-invasive way, potential biological features associated with cancer, he said, making special mention of the contribution of the Radiobiology Research Foundation to this line of research. ●



Konstantinos Syrigos

Professor of Medicine & Oncology
Head, 3rd Department of Medicine
Athens School of Medicine, National
& Kapodistrian University of Athens
Chairman of the BoD, Hellenic Association
of Lung Cancer (HeALC)

Konstantinos Syrigos, professor of Medicine & Oncology, head of the 3rd Department of Medicine, Athens School of Medicine at the National & Kapodistrian University of Athens and chairman of the Hellenic Association of Lung Cancer (HeALC), emphasised that clinical studies are the only way to advance medical science. Regarding the basic principles that should apply to them, he mentioned the following: participation should be voluntary; they should answer truly existing scientific questions; and, finally, they should comply with international standards. He also listed the benefits of clinical trials, such as the increased funding for the healthcare system, staff training, free access to innovative treatments for patients, participation of doctors in international networks, improvement of diagnostic and therapeutic techniques etc. According to surveys, 93% of those who have taken part in a clinical trial would participate again, noted Mr Syrigos, underlining that there are few clinical trials in Greece compared to other European countries. He concluded by saying that the future of clinical trials is digital. ●



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Michalis Karamouzis

Medical oncologist
Professor, Medical School
National and Kapodistrian University
of Athens

Michalis Karamouzis, medical oncologist and professor at the Medical School of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, focused on the prospects of artificial intelligence in cancer research and referred to applications of algorithms. He focused on the concept of machine learning, which is a subset of artificial intelligence (AI), and in particular deep learning, as part of machine learning. Michalis Karamouzis noted that deep learning simulates the functioning of human brain neurons and helps cancer research by collecting data from patients as well as clinical and laboratory data, which can then be put to use through specific models. He concluded that the future goal is to discover and identify new targets to get the best possible results. ●



Christine Chomienne

Professor emeritus
University Paris Cité
Vice-chair
Horizon Europe Cancer Mission Board

Christine Chomienne, professor emeritus at University Paris Cité and vice-chair of the Horizon Europe Cancer Mission Board, focused on two EU initiatives in the fight against cancer: one directly linked to health and the other to research and innovation. Concerning the latter, she commented that the point is to quickly provide citizens with the innovation resulting from research. Furthermore, Ms Chomienne said this is a new path to add value to all other initiatives running at both European and national levels. The concept of the Horizon Europe cancer research, explained Ms Chomienne, is that it brings all the stakeholders together; they can then identify a common question, set it as a priority, while at the same time defining the required means to reach the answer to that question. This offers flexibility and allows running and monitoring parallel projects, Christine Chomienne added. ●



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Vanessa Witte

Executive director
Oncology medical affairs strategy lead
EMEAC, MSD

The pharmaceutical industry's footprint on cancer research and the fight against cancer was the focus of **Vanessa Witte**, executive director and oncology medical affairs strategy lead, EMEAC of MSD. Ms Witte underlined that we are witnessing a revolution in cancer treatment, with declining mortality rates across many cancer types due to improved prevention, earlier diagnosis and better treatment options, as demonstrated by a sharp increase in new drug approvals – 30 new active substances in 2021 alone. She emphasised the shift from treating the cancer itself with conventional cancer treatments to using the power of the immune system to recognize and fight the cancer with immunotherapies – particularly immune checkpoint inhibitors –, which given the example of lung cancer, the leading cause of cancer death in Europe, helped to double the survival horizon of patients with metastatic disease. In addition, she highlighted current development efforts towards moving immunotherapy to earlier disease stages as well as to further deepening responses with combination approaches – combining immunotherapy with chemotherapy, radiotherapy, or targeted therapy, as well as newer modes of action such as antibody-drug conjugates or cancer vaccines. Ms Witte closed her talk by stressing the importance of moving towards a more and more personalised patient-centered approach to better target therapies to those patients who will derive benefit. ●



Emmanouil Saloustris

Associate professor of Oncology
University of Thessaly
Member of the BoD
Hellenic Society of Medical Oncology
(HeSMO)

Emmanouil Saloustris, assistant professor of Oncology, University of Thessaly and member of the Board of Directors of the Hellenic Society of Medical Oncology (HeSMO), noted that the benefits of clinical trials are significant not only for patients but also for hospitals, researchers and the national economy. He said the number of clinical trials in Greece is small, but we have excellent oncology potential in the country, so we will quickly improve our ranking in Europe. Mr Saloustris pointed out the need for more publicity regarding opportunities for joining clinical trials, as the process today via the internet is complicated. He also commented that priority in terms of clinical trials should be given to academic centres and stressed that we should not, at this stage, be concerned about whether machines will replace doctors. Eventually, we will find the right balance so that machines become part of the arsenal at the service of the doctor and the patient, he concluded. ●



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Sofia Agelaki

Professor of Medical Oncology
Faculty of Medicine, University of Crete
Medical oncologist
University General Hospital
of Heraklion, Crete

Professor of Medical Oncology **Sofia Agelaki** from the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Crete and medical oncologist at the University General Hospital of Heraklion, characterised cancer as a global problem, which accounted for 10 million deaths worldwide in 2022 alone. She added that 1 in 2 Europeans eventually develops cancer, and only half survive. According to prognostic models, cancer will continue to be a global problem, with an increasing burden of disease until 2040; the good news is that 40% of cancers will be preventable by simple means, such as lifestyle changes, as Ms Agelaki explained. She added that prevention, early and accurate diagnosis, palliative care and care for survivors are also essential. Early diagnosis improves patients' health and is based on three elements: information regarding the symptoms, clinical evaluation and effective treatment. Ms Agelaki said that as far as Europe's Beating Cancer Plan is concerned, the goal is that 90% of the population with suspicious or predisposing features should be able to get screened for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer. To conclude, she made particular reference to the need for raising awareness among the population, ensuring accurate and swift diagnosis, and providing universal access to care ●



Flora Bacopoulou

Head, HTA Committee
Associate professor
Pediatrics-Adolescent Medicine
National and Kapodistrian University
of Athens

The increasing productivity of the Health Technology Assessment Committee was praised by the head of the Committee and associate professor of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens **Flora Bacopoulou**, who mentioned that in 2020, 239 drugs were assessed, in 2021 the number rose to 308, and in 2022 it reached a total of 416. At the same time, the average waiting time for drug approval is declining, last year being limited to 42 days, as she said. In the same context, Ms Bacopoulou reported that 162 innovative medicines have been submitted for approval to the Committee, 158 of which have received a positive opinion. Of these, she added that 86 applications were for cancer drugs and have been all approved. ●



SUMMARY



Dafni Kaitelidou

President
National Agency for Quality Assurance
in Health (ODIPY)

The importance of Patient-Reported Outcomes, i.e. the self-reported outcomes of a cancer patient, was underlined by **Dafni Kaitelidou**, president of ODIPY (National Agency for Quality Assurance in Health), who argued that this tool enables, on the one hand, health professionals to compare treatments, and on the other to understand what patients experience. However, despite its benefits in Greece, Ms Kaitelidou said, this data needs to be properly disseminated to all stakeholders. Furthermore, Ms Kaitelidou raised the question of integrating this data into clinical practice. "We are not yet where we would like to be. Technology, training of professionals and the available resources do not yet provide us with that possibility," she concluded. ●



Mark Lawler

Associate pro-vice chancellor
Professor of Digital Health
Chair in Translational Cancer Genomics
Queen's University Belfast

The need to look at what will happen to the lives of the 20 million Europeans who are living with or beyond the diagnosis of cancer was highlighted by associate pro-vice chancellor, professor of Digital Health and chair in Translational Cancer Genomics from Queen's University in Belfast **Mark Lawler**, who noted that this is one of the challenges we need to address. After all, as he admitted, we have not yet done much about it. "We need to look at what happens next, but also what are the challenges that these people will face," he said, disclosing that "we have developed a code of practice, that is to say, a model, which focuses on integrating them into normal life and on their right for their history of cancer be forgotten, so that we ensure their access to mortgages or insurance policies, for example." As he pointed out, this is in the spirit of care and should concern not only the patients but also their carers. ●



SUMMARY



Nandia Gogozotou

Non-executive president
EOPYY
President
Drug Price Negotiation Committee

The work of the Drug Price Negotiation Committee of the Greek Ministry of Health was presented by its president and non-executive president of EOPYY **Nandia Gogozotou**, who argued that the aim is to achieve the best possible drug pricing for the state. "For the health system to remain viable, the product must be priced appropriately," she noted. Ms Gogozotou assured that Greece is giving patients access to innovative treatments very quickly, explaining that there are no pending issues regarding pharmaceutical products at the moment. "We have about ten drugs for which negotiations are about to start," she added, reiterating that all innovative treatments are on the list of reimbursed drugs. ●



Michalis Lontos

Medical oncologist
Assistant professor
Department of Clinical Therapeutics
Oncology Unit, National and Kapodistrian
University of Athens

The need to increase people's willingness to participate in screening was the focus of the medical oncologist and assistant professor from the Department of Clinical Therapeutics of the Oncology Unit at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens **Michalis Lontos**. "We need to make a greater effort," he noted, stressing the importance of the data obtained from screening. Regarding the economic side of the issue, he argued that Greece is a clinician's paradise. "We have access to whichever treatment is approved. This is very satisfying", commented Michalis Lontos, explaining, of course, that for the system to be sustainable, the protocols of the Oncology Society must be implemented in cooperation with the state. ●



SUMMARY



Federico Milani

Deputy head
Data Policy and Innovation Unit
DG CONNECT
European Commission

Harnessing artificial intelligence is a catalyst for data management in healthcare, according to **Federico Milani**, deputy head of the Data Policy and Innovation Unit of DG CONNECT, European Commission, who focused not only on the value of purely medical data but also of other patient-related information that can contribute to research. He referred to European initiatives on the subject, such as the European Health Data Spaces. The aim of this project, according to Mr Milani, is to exploit the potential of health data fully, in a way that enables patients to have access to their health records anywhere in Europe so that as they move from one place to another, all of their medical history is made available to their attending physician. In addition, this initiative facilitates the full realisation of safe and secure exchange, use and reuse of health-related data, with trust being a key factor. Federico Milani also talked about rules and standards, based on the general data protection regulation, that will guarantee the reliability of this new data-handling network and its contribution to medical research. ●



Michail Nikolaou

Medical oncologist
1st Medical Oncology Department
General Anticancer-Oncology Hospital
of Athens "Saint Savvas"

The health sector faces significant challenges in the digital age, said **Michail Nikolaou**, medical oncologist at the 1st Medical Oncology Department, General Anticancer-Oncology Hospital of Athens "Saint Savvas", stressing that the most critical challenges of all have to do with increased expenditure due to the ageing population and the rising cost of research and development (R&D) for new drugs. He noted, inter alia, that new digital technologies can contribute to meeting such challenges. Mr Nikolaou mentioned, for example, that in 2050, 12.5% of Greece's population will be over 85 years old, while by 2030, the share of the EU population over 65 years old is estimated to reach 25%, up from 19% in 2019. With increasing life expectancy and an ageing population, he noted that the demand for health services is expected to rise significantly. In addition, according to Mr Nikolaou, despite progress in reducing contagious diseases due to vaccinations, the market is shaped by the growing needs of ageing populations living longer with chronic disease, most notably cancer, cardiovascular disease and diabetes. ●



SUMMARY



Olga Balaoura

President of the Board & CEO
General Anticancer-Oncology Hospital
of Athens "Saint Savvas"

Olga Balaoura, president of the BoD and CEO at the Athens General Anticancer and Oncology Hospital "Saint Savvas", spoke about "OIKOTHEN", a model programme for administering treatment to oncology patients at home, presenting the potential benefits of its long-awaited implementation. In particular, based on indicative data for the first three years of the programme's operation, it is anticipated that almost 10,000 hospitalisations will be saved thanks to home services to patients, with a corresponding increase in hospital capacity by 15%-20% annually. However, based on the key findings of the current operating model, Ms Balaoura believes all adjustments must meet certain fundamental design principles to ensure that the needs of future home care services for oncology patients are met. In the same context, she considers it appropriate to ensure the smooth implementation of the proposed functional and organisational model by creating a service focusing on the patient and their needs, thus maintaining the existing operational advantages of the General Anticancer and Oncology Hospital Saint Savvas and the "Nikos Kourkoulos" One-Day Clinic, a process that will also involve clarifying and separating roles and responsibilities, optimising operating costs, etc. ●



Paris Kosmidis

Head of the Second Medical Oncology
Department, "Hygeia" Hospital
Former president, European Society
of Medical Oncology (ESMO)

The head of the Second Medical Oncology Department of "Hygeia" Hospital and former president of the European Society of Medical Oncology (ESMO) **Paris Kosmidis** highlighted the crucial role of digital medicine in the health sector. He referred to the initiatives being rolled out, with the Saint Savvas" Anticancer Hospital as their point of focus. As he said, from now on, we have to learn to live with digital medicine and see how to make it even better. He commented that at the EU level essential projects are being promoted and an effort is being made to use secondary data with significant benefit for policies developed in the health sector, similar to what was done with the data produced during the pandemic. However, Mr Kosmidis wondered how it could ever be possible to collect data if we still lacked digital patient records. He explained that implementing digital medicine at Saint Savvas Hospital or providing support to cancer patients remotely via the "CareAcross" platform is not enough; we need a generalised plan of action regarding digital medicine with implementation clauses. ●



SUMMARY



Zenia Saridaki-Zoras

Medical oncologist
Director, 1st Oncology Department
Metropolitan Hospital
President of the BoD
Hellenic Society of Medical Oncology
(HeSMO)

In a national action plan for cancer control, **Zenia Saridaki-Zoras** pointed out, the development of a national cancer registry is of paramount importance, only to be complemented by the introduction of a concrete “pathway” for patient screening, the connection of treatment protocols with the e-Government Centre for Social Security, equal access for all, the necessary biomarker testing coverage, the institutional framework for the operation and evaluation of laboratories, accurate information and education of patients and caregivers, as well as prevention and outreach activities. Ms Saridaki also referred to, among other things, specific initiatives undertaken by the Hellenic Society of Medical Oncology (HeSMO), such as evidence-based information on every type of cancer, the campaign for World Cancer Day, the creation of videos and radio ads on prevention, etc. ●

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