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Position Paper

Identifying critical steps towards improved access to innovation in cancer care: a European CanCer Organisation position paper

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Abstract In recent decades cancer care has seen improvements in the speed and accuracy of diagnostic procedures; the effectiveness of surgery, radiation therapy and medical treatments; the power of information technology; and the development of multidisciplinary, specialist-led approaches to care. Such innovations are essential if we are to continue improving the lives of cancer patients across Europe despite financial pressures on our healthcare systems. Investment in innovation must be balanced with the need to ensure the sustainability of healthcare budgets, and all health professionals have a responsibility to help achieve this balance. It requires scrutiny of the way care is delivered; we must be ready to discontinue practices or interventions that are inefficient, and prioritise innovations that may deliver the best outcomes possible for patients within the limits of available resources. Decisions on innovations should take into account their long-term impact on patient outcomes and costs, not just their immediate costs. Adopting a culture of innovation requires a multidisciplinary team approach, with the patient at the centre and an integral part of the team. It must take a whole-system and whole-patient perspective on cancer care and be guided by high-quality real-world data, including outcomes relevant to the patient and actual costs of care; this accurately reflects the impact of any innovation in clinical practice. The European CanCer Organisation is committed to working with its member societies, patient organisations and the cancer community at large to find sustainable ways to identify and integrate the most meaningful innovations into all aspects of cancer care.
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1. Introduction

Over the last two to three decades, the field of cancer has seen improvements in the speed and accuracy of diagnostic procedures [1], the effectiveness of surgery [2–4], radiation therapy [5,6] and medical treatments [7,8] and the power of information technology [9]. Development of clinical support roles—such as those of specialist oncology nurses and of multidisciplinary, specialist-led approaches to care—have also played an important role in improving the care offered to cancer patients.

Investment in all these innovations is critical if we are to continue to improve the lives of cancer patients across all age groups in years to come. However, there is growing evidence of inequalities in, and complex barriers to access to, many innovations in Europe, as healthcare systems are increasingly challenging their costs, and out-of-pocket payments for cancer care are growing [10,11].

Although much of the literature and policy debate focuses on inequalities in access to anticancer medicines [12,13], significant inequalities also exist for other aspects of cancer care. Within this context, it is critical to balance investment in innovation with the need to ensure the sustainability of healthcare budgets, and this is a global concern [14–16].

In all countries, notions of innovation and value are intrinsically linked. We need to apply more scrutiny to the way we deliver care today, be ready to remove or discontinue practices or interventions that are inefficient, and be forward-thinking to prioritise innovations that may deliver the best outcomes possible for patients with the resources at hand. Implementation of innovations also needs to follow a structured pathway, and practices should be adapted to accommodate them. Greater transparency is needed on prices and pricing policies, as has been called for by the European Cancer Leagues Task Force for Equal Access to Cancer Medicines. This being said, investment decisions on innovations should consider the long-term impact of innovations on patient outcomes and costs, not just their immediate costs.

All health professionals have a key responsibility to help achieve this balance. Within this context, this article offers a multidisciplinary perspective on how we can responsibly and sustainably encourage access to the most meaningful innovations for cancer patients in years to come whilst improving on existing practice and decreasing waste and inefficiencies across all aspects of cancer care. It was developed by the European CanCer Organisation (ECCO) with input from its member societies and the ECCO Patient Advisory Committee and is intended as the basis for future actions to be taken by relevant health professionals. These actions will be developed into an action plan in the next few months.

2. How do we define innovation in cancer care?

It may be argued that the term 'innovation' has been over-used in recent years and is usually thought of simply as 'something new' [18,19]. However, 'newer' is not necessarily better than older alternatives, and in reality what constitutes an innovation is more nuanced. Innovation can take place within any aspect of cancer care. It does not have to be complex, or expensive; simple interventions may often have the greatest impact on improving patient care. In addition, meaningful progress often occurs over time, as a result of a series of

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