

# Working together

We know that research helps save lives, so we must ensure that the results of Europe's excellent research reaches citizens, argue **Cornelis van de Velde** and **Julio Celis**

**T**he European Cancer Organisation (ECCO) exists to uphold the right of all European cancer patients to the best possible treatment and care. This involves promoting interaction between all organisations involved in cancer research, education, treatment and care at European level. Through its 24 member societies, representing 60,000 oncology professionals as well as patient advocates, ECCO is the only multidisciplinary and multi-professional organisation that connects and responds to all oncology stakeholders Europe-wide.

The theme of this year's World cancer day, which will take place on February 4, will be 'Together we can beat cancer', and this is intrinsic to our work. The sheer complexity of cancer means that by speaking with one voice, we can help all stakeholders grasp the immense implications and major challenges facing oncology professionals and specialists in treating an increasingly ageing and diverse population, especially in an era of targeted therapies.

Oncologists

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are not alone however. The health challenges facing Europe are huge, with burgeoning healthcare costs facing national governments in a time of austerity. Moreover, fragmentation, administrative and regulatory complexity and lack of sustainability of research projects, is unfortunately the norm for all health disciplines.

Research is the key to identifying causes of disease and developing strategies for prevention, as well as diagnosis and treatment. It helps save lives. New treatments, drugs and technologies are a result of many years of study, trials, promise and investment. But a strategic approach across the entire health spectrum needs to be taken to ensure excellent research results reach Europe's citizens.

That is why ECCO is a founding member of the alliance for biomedical research in Europe (biomed alliance), along with the European association for the study of diabetes, European respiratory society and European society of cardiology. It is a huge undertaking to create an alliance that represents around 200,000 professionals and aims to provide a unified voice for the biomedical



community but it is only by doing so that we feel we can truly make an impact and bring the growing healthcare crisis to the attention of policymakers.

The European commission's recent Horizon 2020 framework programme proposals have therefore been reviewed by the alliance with interest. Coming at a time of economic pressure, it is vital to emphasise the importance of investing in health research to ensure innovation and growth and maintain Europe's research competitiveness. Thus, ECCO and the biomed alliance were disappointed that while 12 per cent of the budget was allocated to health research in the last framework programme, only 10 per cent was allocated in Horizon 2020, despite the clear health challenges facing the EU and member states.

Consolidating expertise and resources across borders and speeding up the translation of discoveries into applications that impact healthcare delivery is essential. Innovative ways to address such issues are currently being considered, namely through a 'European council for health research' (EuCHR). ECCO believes that working with the alliance to strengthen health research in Europe could have huge advantages.

A European initiative that centralises and coordinates biomedical and clinical research can provide significant added value by addressing the current fragmented research landscape in Europe and help to accelerate the translation of discoveries into applications that impact healthcare delivery.

To move this vision forward, a group of key opinion leaders have been invited to provide input on how a EuCHR could be created. Members of this expert group include Nobel prize-winner Harald zur Hausen, former Portuguese minister for science and technology José Mariano Gago and patient advocate and member of the Cypriot parliament, Stella Kyriakidis.

However, political momentum is also required. MEP Maria da Graça Carvalho offered her support for the creation of this 'council' at the recent alliance's general assembly. Actively demonstrating her commitment further, Carvalho organised a high-level meeting with the alliance on 24 January to brainstorm with key drivers in EU health research policy. She is also taking feedback from the alliance to the next meeting of key experts on Horizon 2020 at the European parliament either in late February or March.

Similar to ECCO's commitment to multidisciplinary cancer prevention, treatment and care, a multidisciplinary approach towards EU policymakers, can also be effective. Just like world cancer day efforts, we believe that certain issues can be tackled more effectively working with the entire cancer continuum, as well as all health disciplines.

By joining together with other major disciplines, we can ensure the scientific community has a voice on the future of research in Europe and help to safeguard Europe's competitiveness in biomedical research.★



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