Experts say cancer researchers must work together

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Cancer diseases are becoming more complex and EU research institutes have to work closer together to identify diagnosis and define better treatment for the patients, experts say.

Cancer biology is expanding enormously and growing more complex, with 200 cancer diagnosis and thousands of different subgroups.

In order to treat patients optimally, it is necessary that European cancer institutes work together in research to identify all these groups and to find specific treatments, officials say.

"As the technology needed to do the research is getting more and more complex, all the centres can't afford it. Therefore, we have to work together. Comprehensive cancer centres is a key solution to the challenges," said Ulrik Ringborg, a professor of oncology at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm.

He spoke at an event hosted by the Organisation of European Cancer Institutes (OECI) at the Jules Bordet Institute in Brussels Tuesday (14 May), as part of the 2013 Oncology Days.

"If you can treat the relevant tumours at an earlier stage, the chances of a cure is very high," Ringborg added.

Cost-effective treatment?

In the future, personalised medicine where a treatment or drug is tailored to an individual's biological and genetic features will become increasingly important.

Not only will this increase the effectiveness of the treatment, it will also decrease the toxicity of treatments by avoiding ineffective, expensive and harmful treatments for patients.

"Specialisation, concentration services and multidisciplinarity are becoming increasingly important. There is a need for patient centredness in organisations," said Wim van Harten, the president of OECI.

At the same time, there is an increase of costs for new anti-cancer agents, so the clinical efficacy has to be improved, Ringborg stressed.

"The problem is that the process [of developing new drugs] is not optimal. It's getting more and more complex, you need more and more resources and experts to predict a treatment. That increases costs," the Swedish professor said.

Ringborg reiterated that the solution could be more cooperation between the pharmaceutical industry and academic centres for drug development

Marco Pierotti from the Fondazione Istituti Nazionale dei Tumori in Milan concluded that cancer is now such a complex disease that the dream is no longer to have a cancer-free world.

The goal is now to have a world without cancer deaths and that goal is realistic, Pierotti stated.

POSITIONS:

Dominique de Valeriola, medical director of the **Jules Bordet** institute, said:

"OECI institutions are convinced that oncology centres have an important role to play in tackling cancer in Europe. This means not only in the field of cancer care, but also in the domains of research, training and education, prevention as well as public awareness. This European vision is needed not only to face the increasing burden of the cancer diseases related to the population ageing, but also to respond to the free circulation of patients in a more and more translational Europe."

NEXT STEPS:

- **14-16 May:** OECI 2013 Oncology Days in Brussels.

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