



Commissioner Margrethe Vestager,
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 170, 1049 Brussels

Open letter from the Association of European Cancer Leagues Task Force on Equal Access to Cancer Medicines and the Danish Cancer Society to Margrethe Vestager, European Commissioner for Competition, copied to Vytenis Andriukaitis, European Commissioner for Health

Subject: European collaboration on equal access to cancer medicines and the role of EU competition policy

2nd February 2017

Dear Commissioner Vestager,

The Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL) Task Force on Equal Access to Cancer Medicines and the Danish Cancer Society would like to express our appreciation for your recent address at the Association of the Danish Pharmaceutical Industry New Year Conference in Copenhagen on the 27th January 2017¹.

In a time where cancer incidence has been rising in Europe, treatment has become vital in controlling the burden of the disease. Scientific breakthroughs have occurred in the development of cancer medicines, offering new hope to patients where there may have been little before. However, many cancer medicines also bear a hefty price tag. Although the increase in innovative and promising treatments should be celebrated, patient access and availability should be central to the system, and all stakeholders should be working together to achieve this. We fully agree with you, Commissioner, when you say that “innovative products won't improve people's lives if they can't afford to buy them”. This is true for cancer and broader chronic disease patients.

In April 2016, the Dutch Cancer Society launched a coalition of ECL national member cancer societies to work specifically on this topic in a special Task Force. The Task Force aims to facilitate an international network of ECL members to work together towards equal access to cancer medicines for all cancer patients by collaborating and sharing best practices from their national experiences. The Danish Cancer Society is a prominent member of this task force.

¹ The content of this letter refers to a speech delivered by Commissioner Margrethe Vestager at the Association of the Danish Pharmaceutical Industry New Year Conference in Copenhagen on the 27th January 2017, available here http://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/vestager/announcements/restoring-trust-our-economy_en



Strong and coherent competition policies applying to the medical industry are crucial to ensuring access to affordable medicines as well as promoting further innovation. Although new and innovative medicines provide new hope for patients and society in the fight against cancer, some older therapies are often fundamental to a patient's treatment path. In this sense, generic and biosimilar medicines can provide a safe and viable alternative at a more reasonable price. Generics and biosimilars should be allowed access to market, within the existing, high standards of patient safety. Competition policies have proved to be effective in curbing 'pay for delay' tactics in particular. Strong and balanced competition rules ensure that innovation is sparked and fostered within the industry, but also encourage the development of generics and biosimilars and striking this balance in a manner that is fair to all stakeholders. Equally, competition policies should not be used as a barrier to open and transparent discussion on the broader theme of patient access and pricing policies.

The theme of trust throughout your speech resonated well with the members of the ECL Task Force. All stakeholders in this area have a role and responsibility in ensuring medicines reach the patient in a way that is safe, timely and affordable. Your call to the pharmaceutical industry to step up to their responsibility in complying with EU competition rules is momentous, at a time where all stakeholders need to seek solutions together. We are committed as a Task Force to collaborate with all stakeholders in order to ensure equal access to existing and innovative cancer medicines for all cancer patients.

Finally, we would like to thank you for your commitment to strong EU competition policy applying to this sector, and we are confident this will have an impact in the accessibility of medicines for patients all over Europe. We are ready to provide our support to achieve this, a goal we will only achieve through collaboration.

We look forward to engaging with you on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Eveline Scheres

Chair of the ECL Task Force on
Equal Access to Cancer
Medicines



Sakari Karjalainen

President, Association of
European Cancer Leagues



Dorthe Crüger

Chairman of the Danish
Cancer Society





Annex – Our position statement

European Task Force for Equal Access to Cancer Medicines: Declaration of Intent

CONTEXT

Both medical and technological developments have led to the increased provision of cancer medicines on the market. These improved and advanced treatments make it possible for cancer patients to survive or live longer with a better quality of life. Unfortunately, the number of people diagnosed with cancer is rising every year. The combination of increased cancer incidence in the population and new technologically advanced cancer medicines results in a situation where the total cost of cancer is rising which puts an unprecedented demand on healthcare budgets and/or makes treatment unaffordable for many cancer patients. There is a growing risk that affordability or pricing of the medication will become a deciding factor in a patient's cancer treatment in the hospital or in the doctor's office. This leads to instability and unpredictability; which is particularly undesirable to a patient who has received a cancer diagnosis. A political and social discussion must be held and as a result policy must be developed in order to ensure equal and affordable access to cancer medicines. Patients must be able to rely on receiving the best possible treatment to match their medical needs and optimise their potential for beating their disease.

CALL FOR ACTION

New cancer medicines offer new perspectives for patients with diseases that could hardly be treated or cured in the past. However, with these advanced cancer medicines come dilemmas concerning the extremely high cost and a rising number of cancer patients. Measures that are currently taken to guarantee the accessibility of new medicines and to limit their cost are no longer sufficient.

The sustainability of health care systems is also at stake. In our opinion it is important to tackle the problem of rising (and high) prices for new cancer medicines with members of the pharmaceutical industry. Their 'contract with society' has to be redefined. Decisions related to pricing and reimbursement of cancer medicines are primarily the responsibility of national governments and third parties. Since the problem of access and affordability exists in many parts of Europe and beyond, it is necessary to join forces on an international level, exchange information and best practices and look for possible common solutions.

To assure the accessibility of innovative cancer medicines for all cancer patients, the countries of this task force have decided to join forces. This task force that will actively address the problems that threaten the accessibility of cancer medicines in an international setting, starting in Europe. We will work towards the following goals:



OUR GOALS

Our ultimate goal is to achieve equal access to medicines for all cancer patients in Europe.

Goal 1: The cancer societies of this task force state that all effective and innovative cancer treatments now and in the future should be accessible to patients. Patients cannot suffer from a dysfunctional system and/or unsustainable financial and pricing arrangements in the prescription of medicines.

Goal 2: Medicine prices should be sustainable and proportionate to real cost of research and development and added therapeutic value. In that respect an open, transparent and continuous dialogue with the pharmaceutical industry is needed. Knowledge and information must be shared internationally and co-operation must be sought after.

Goal 3: Cancer medicines that have a distinctive therapeutic added value should reach patients in a timely manner, in the safest way and at affordable prices. The patients should be fully informed of the possible benefits and harms.

Goal 4: Cancer societies in Europe should work together to get and keep this issue on the national and European agendas of politicians, policy makers and the pharmaceutical industry

Goal 5: Patients should at all times be involved in the decision-making process (eg. joint decision making concerning policies as well as treatment process).

Signatories to this declaration



Association of European Cancer
Leagues (ECL)



Cancer Focus Northern Ireland



Cancer Foundation, Luxembourg



Cancer Society of Finland



Danish Cancer Society



Dutch Cancer Society



Foundation against Cancer, Belgium



Catalan Federation of Cancer Organizations and Entities



The Cyprus Anti-Cancer Society



French League against Cancer



German Cancer Society



Irish Cancer Society



League against Cancer, Slovakia



Portuguese League against Cancer



Societatea Româna de Cancer

Romanian Cancer Society



Stand up to Cancer, Flanders, Belgium



Swiss Cancer League