

ECL 40th Annual Conference: the future of cancer prevention & control in Europe

9 November 2020

Online

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE ECL HONORARY AWARD WINNER

Sakari Karjalainen, President - Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)

ECL President, Dr Sakari Karjalainen opened the annual conference, which due to the ongoing pandemic was held entirely online for the very first time.

To celebrate the 40th anniversary, this conference celebrates the past and looks towards the future of cancer control. Dr Karjalainen began by reflecting on the achievements of ECL and progress made in cancer control over the past decades. Turning towards the future, on behalf of ECL and its member leagues, Dr Karjalainen called for the whole cancer community and wider stakeholders to unite around a vision for a future without cancer. This will require an enhanced focus on prevention, investment into research on unknown causes and better therapies for cancer, plus ensuring fair and equal access for all to the effective treatments and care. The 40th anniversary ECL conference addressed some of these issues through keynote presentations by Dr Elisabete Weiderpass (Director of the International Agency for Research on Cancer [IARC]) and Commissioner Stella Kyriakides (Commissioner for Health & Food Safety, European Commission).

To mark the special occasion of the 40th anniversary, for the very first time in its history, ECL launched an annual award to celebrate the outstanding professionals who have dedicated their careers towards advancing cancer control. Dr Karjalainen outlined the principles by which the honour would be awarded. The award recipient should demonstrate excellence in their field, making a significant contribution to addressing the cancer burden, and have inspired others during their professional life.

The recipient of the inaugural ECL Honorary Award overwhelmingly meets all these criteria: Dr Max Parkin, Honorary Senior Research Fellow - Nuffield Department of Population Health, University of Oxford.

Dr Donald Maxwell (Max) Parkin was born in 1944, and graduated summa cum laude in medicine at Edinburgh University in 1968, where he later took an MD (1985). After an early career in clinical medicine, he moved to Public Health, working in Edinburgh, Leeds, the USA (University of Michigan) before moving to Lyon (France) to join the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in 1981 where he became head of the department of Descriptive Epidemiology. He remained in Lyon for 23 years, publishing extensively on cancer epidemiology, notably on geographic patterns and trends, as well as on the evaluation of cancer screening. In 2004 he returned to UK and joined the University of Oxford as Honorary Senior Research Fellow and from 2005-2016 at the Wolfson

Institute, Queen Mary University of London. He continues his association with IARC as a Senior Visiting Scientist coordinating the activities of cancer registries in Africa.

In accepting the award, Dr Parkin thanked the ECL executive board for honouring him as the first recipient of the award. Dr Parkin noted that much of the work recognised in his citation for the award was conducted during his time at IARC. Dr Parkin pointed to the creation of the European Network of Cancer Registries (ENCR) in 1989 as particularly important landmark. This initiative was put forward by the European Commission and for the first twenty-five years was coordinate by IARC. ENCR played a large role in setting standards, organising training and promoting the role of cancer registries in research, alongside the core duties of providing statistical updates on the cancer burden in Europe. Moreover, the impact of this work has extended beyond Europe, influencing standards and practice internationally. Dr Parkin concluded by paying thanks to the European Union and to Cancer Leagues in Europe for their support for cancer registries.

FUTURE OF CANCER PREVENTION IN EUROPE

Elisabete Weiderpass, Director – International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC)

Dr Weiderpass congratulated ECL on its 40th anniversary, and extended a special congratulations to Dr Parkin on his extraordinary achievements, which have led the way in showing the world how cancer registration should be done.

Introducing the work of the agency, Dr Weiderpass outlined the four pillars of action in cancer prevention: “who gets cancer”, describing the occurrence of cancer; “why do we get cancer”, describing the causes of cancer; “what measures work in prevention”, describing the effective measures for implementation; and “how to build capacity”, mobilising knowledge and communication to both citizens and decision makers alike.

Prevention is so important when we consider the rising burden of cancer, which will see an additional 100 million cancer cases in Europe projected over the next twenty years. Putting into practice simply what is already known could prevent at least 40% of all cancers today.

One initiative IARC has developed to work on the future of cancer prevention is ‘Cancer Prevention Europe’, which involves several cancer leagues alongside partners from universities and research institutes. Cancer Prevention Europe focuses on implementation research, advocacy, innovation in prevention, and coordinating activities.

Additionally, a further initiative of key relevance to the future of cancer prevention is the European Code against Cancer. Now in its 4th edition, the European Code against Cancer provides citizens with twelve evidence-based recommendations they can follow to reduce their cancer risk. Dr Weiderpass expressed her gratitude to cancer leagues for their long-standing commitment to promoting the European Code against Cancer.

Finally, of key importance for the future of the cancer prevention are the European Union's proposed Cancer Mission. The Cancer Mission, of which Dr Weiderpass was a steering board member, proposes an ambitious research agenda with a clear goal of 3 million lives saved, living longer and better by 2030.

In conclusion, cancer is one of Europe's major societal challenges. Therefore, Europe needs better and equitable prevention and diagnosis, treatment and care, survival rates and post-cancer quality of life. A strategic plan for cancer prevention is required encompassing research, planning, implementation and evaluation. Cancer Prevention Europe can provide a rallying point for diverse stakeholders to shape the future cancer prevention agenda.

FUTURE OF CANCER CONTROL IN THE EU - EUROPE'S BEATING CANCER PLAN

Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health & Food Safety – European Commission

Commissioner Kyriakides congratulated the Association of European Cancer Leagues on the occasion of its 40th anniversary. The Commissioner pointed out the areas of tobacco control, raising awareness through the youth ambassadors, research support and support for cancer patients and their families.

2020 has undoubtedly been a difficult year for cancer patients and their families due to the unprecedented pandemic. Healthcare services have been heavily disrupted, which has affected the whole cancer care pathway and cancer patients' wellbeing.

The Commission is mobilising all resources available to tackle this challenge. Of most relevance for cancer control are the soon to be adopted EU4Health programme and the Beating Cancer Plan, which is a top priority for the entire Commission.

The Plan will address cancer in a holistic way, covering: (1) prevention; (2) early detection; (3) diagnosis and treatment; and (4) quality of life of cancer patients and survivors. The first pillar of the Plan aims to prevent the preventable with actions on healthy lifestyles and environmental pollution. Early detection of cancer through screening will be stepped up through better implementation and roll out of existing programmes for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer screening. The third pillar on diagnosis and treatment will ensure more integrated and comprehensive care, and address the unequal access to quality care and medicines. Pillar 4 looks at important survivorship issues, such as rehabilitation, emotional distress, potential tumour recurrence, and metastatic disease. After all, it's not just about how long you live. We need to strive for more, so the real question is how long and how well you live.

Europe's Beating Cancer Plan will also address other key oncology issues that open the doors to better cancer outcomes, such as research, data and new technologies. For this, the link to the Cancer Mission will be crucial. The Commission will ensure close alignment between the Cancer Mission and Beating Cancer Plan to ensure a smooth transition from research to policy.

In closing, the Commissioner expressed her sincere wishes to collaborate with cancer leagues to implement this ambitious agenda. There is a unique opportunity to make a difference in cancer control, and we cannot let it go to waste.

ECL YOUTH AMBASSADORS FOR THE EUROPEAN CODE AGAINST CANCER – A CALL TO ACTION

Ariadna Feliu Josa, Elsa Picão & Pawel Koczkodaj, Youth Ambassadors for the European Code Against Cancer - Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)

On behalf of the ECL Youth Ambassadors, Elsa Picão (Youth Ambassador, Portugal) shared an important new milestone with the first publication authored on behalf of the programme. The Youth Ambassadors programme was presented at the 2019 ECL annual conference. On that occasion, cancer leagues challenged the Youth Ambassadors to think big and broaden their horizons. This inspired has inspired the Ambassadors to move forward and set more ambitious goals and objectives.

The Youth Ambassadors programme is a unique network developed in order to promote the European Code against Cancer widely, emphasising fellow young people through peer-to-peer learning. The Call to Action invites all cancer leagues to join the Ambassadors and work together in promoting the European Code against Cancer; address the research community to explore ways to engage the digital generation in new and exciting way; and asks the Commission to collaborate in order to better communicate about cancer control to the young people.

Not being alone and working together matters. This allows for collaboration between researchers, policymakers, NGOs and others. It also requires a strong youth voice to make a future without cancer a mission possible.

CLOSING REMARKS

Sakari Karjalainen, President - Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)

Dr Karjalainen noted that this year's conference was special not only for marking 40 years of ECL but for being the first conference to be held entirely online. Next year's annual conference is scheduled to be held in Cyprus, hosted by ECL member the Cyprus Anti-Cancer Society. It is hoped that the conference will be able to be held as a physical meeting. Dr Karjalainen concluded the conference by thanking all speakers and participants for joining and showing solidarity in the continued efforts to control cancer.