

Cancerworld

European Cancer Community urged to sign-up to help Ukrainian patients

Janet Fricker / 15 March 2022



The European Cancer Organisation (ECO) and American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) have launched a network to provide an infrastructure to support Ukrainian cancer patients. The [Special Network on the Impact of the War in the Ukraine on Cancer](#), launched 9 March, will function as a [hub to direct healthcare workers and patients](#) to real-time information, experience, and contacts. The initiative will operate across multiple languages, both inside the Ukraine and across Europe.

“Continued access to oncology services must be available for displaced people, regardless of where they’re forced to migrate. We must do everything possible to avoid disruptions to their care. Cancer does not wait,” said ECO President Andreas Charalambous.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 400,000 Ukrainians are currently suffering from cancer, with more than 160,000 new cancer cases diagnosed in 2020 alone. Issues faced by cancer patients differ according to whether they are currently in the Ukraine or refugees. For patients remaining in the Ukraine opportunities for getting treatment are reduced as hospitals are bombed, where they still exist patients are often too frightened to travel to centres, and drug shortages are starting to hit with supply lines offering no prospect of replacements.

Cancer patients who have crossed the border into neighbouring countries (which excludes men with

cancer who are unable to leave the country) are being triaged by healthcare workers with no access to their medical records who additionally often do not speak the same language.

The new network, co-chaired by Andreas Charalambous, Eric Winer (President-Elect of ASCO), and Richard Sullivan (WHO Emergency Committee member) has identified its initial steps as:

- Creating a community for sharing of intelligence, experience and contacts;
- Providing an information hub of resources and links in national languages signposting and amplifying work being done for Ukrainian patients;
- Using intelligence gathered from those in the field to identify in real time the primary challenges being posed to ensuring care and treatment of Ukrainian cancer patients, and helping implement, or advocate for, necessary ameliorating policy measures.

The network is about offering a location where information on Ukraine cancer care is available in one place. “We want to provide the right tools to mobilise the European cancer community to play their part in the overall response to this appalling situation. Cancer is a complex subject, with loads of different organisations involved, so we want to create a one-stop shop. It’s about avoiding duplication of effort,” explains Mike Morrissey, ECO’s Chief Executive.

An example of intelligence gathering, he adds, is the information received today on the urgent need for psychosocial care for cancer patients facing the dual traumas of cancer and exposure to violence.

The network hopes members of the oncology community – whether health professionals, cancer organisations or patient advocacy groups – will sign-up to take part, [sign-up to take part](#). “They can help us to understand what we already have in place, identify the gaps, and then help us to fill those gaps,” says Morrissey.

Such communication will be especially important in the coming days when there is likely to be a need to re-distribute refugees who require specialist care to centres around Europe. “We’re hoping to launch an app where people will be able to communicate directly with each other on specific topics and needs,” says Morrissey.