



A stronger voice within Europe

→ Kathy Redmond ■ EDITOR

An opportunity is opening up for Europe's cancer community to increase its influence over health and research policies, by overcoming its fragmentation to speak with a single voice.

The Federation of European Cancer Societies (FECS), the umbrella organisation for Europe's professional oncology bodies, is looking to transform itself into a single European cancer society vested with the authority to speak for Europe's cancer professionals as a whole.

Achieving this would be a huge step forward. But in today's Europe, it is the voice of the patient and of patient organisations that holds the greatest sway over politicians. Forming a strategic alliance between the people who use cancer services and those who provide and plan these services is therefore vital if Europe's cancer community is to maximise its impact. The US cancer community provides many good examples of how such an alliance might work. The Cancer Leadership Council (CLC) is one. Set up in 1993 by eight cancer patient organisations with the aim of influencing health policy decisions, the CLC has expanded to include non-patient groups such as the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), the American Cancer Society, the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), and the American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology (ASTRO). The

CLC is now a 29-member forum, which takes positions on issues as diverse as stem cell research, reimbursement of clinical trials, regulation of pain medications and FDA guidelines. Policy makers listen because the views represent a broad spectrum of the US cancer community – not just physicians.

The American Federation of Clinical Oncologic Societies is another example. It is an informal coalition of professional oncology societies representing physicians, nurses, social workers and other health care providers, established to advocate for universal access to quality cancer care. Such informal alliances provide the opportunity for members to meet, explore issues, generate practical solutions, and develop plans for action without the hierarchy, costs and bureaucratic trappings of a formal organisation. Closer to home, the European Breast Cancer Conference provides a good example of a successful patient-professional partnership.

Whether the issue be inequities in access to quality care, bureaucratic clinical trial regulations or insufficient research funding, collaboration between patient and professional organisations can achieve far more than when each works in isolation. Given the recent establishment of a number of pan-European cancer patient advocacy organisations, and also the current focus on uniting Europe's professional cancer bodies, it is probably easier for this to happen today than ever before.