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Letter to the Editor

The Stockholm Declaration[☆]

European cancer research, when looked at in a global perspective, has a number of unique strengths, such as a strong foundation in biomedical science, good patient registries and biobanks. However, research is still fragmented and lacks the critical mass needed to translate basic research discoveries into a clinical setting for the diagnosis and treatment of cancer patients.

Oncology is a unique discipline which is increasingly depending on multidisciplinary. The concept was progressively defined during the 20th century and developed around clinical considerations in order to have surgeons, radiologists, pathologists, radiation- and medical oncologists working together in concord.

The current explosion of new concepts and technologies emerging from molecular- and cellular biology has made it necessary to bridge the gap between the various fields of basic, epidemiological and clinical research. No single European cancer institution has the critical mass to deliver in all cancer areas. As a result, European institutions must work together to create a world-class infrastructure in which all disciplines are integrated with the aim of innovating in cancer care and prevention.

A Comprehensive Cancer Center (CCC) is a facility in which care and prevention is integrated with research and education. The concept of a CCC arose as a consequence of the increasing complexity of cancer activities and increasing needs for innovation. The translational cancer research continuum, in which the patients are always in focus, stands at the heart of a CCC where all components of the research process, from basic to clinical to outcome research are fully integrated with each other. This structure should ensure that research and implementation of new technologies are adapted to patient care and evaluated in response to research results.

In our view, a platform of CCCs linked to basic research centres will provide the world-class infrastructure that Europe needs to perform state-of-the-art discovery-driven translational research.

We have therefore decided to work together towards the creation of a collaborative platform comprising leading CCCs and basic/preclinical research centres in Europe. Such a platform of centres, we believe, is the only possible way to reach the critical mass and sustainability that is necessary to innovate and deliver in all areas of cancer research.

[☆] This declaration is a public statement of commitment to the strategy and practice of a platform of comprehensive cancer centers (CCCs) and basic/preclinical cancer research centers. This initiative was launched on November 6th, 2007 in Stockholm, Sweden with 17 inaugural signatories.

Alliance Against Cancer, Italy (Angelo Paradiso).
 Cancer Research UK Cambridge Research Institute, Cambridge, UK (Bruce Ponder, Carlos Caldas).
 Christie Hospital Manchester/Manchester Cancer Research Center, Manchester, UK (Chris Harrison).
 Danish Cancer Society, Institute of Cancer Biology, Copenhagen, Denmark (Julio E. Celis).
 Erasmus University Medical Center, Rotterdam, The Netherlands (Alexander Eggermont).
 European Institute of Oncology, Milan, Italy (Gordon McVie).
 German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany (Otmar D. Wiestler).
 Institut Gustave-Roussy, Villejuif, France (Thomas Tursz).
 Institut Jules Bordet, Brussels, Belgium (Dominique de Valeriola).
 Institute Curie, Paris, France (Sergio Roman-Roman).
 Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden (Ulrik Ringborg).
 The Netherlands Cancer Institute, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (Anton Berns).
 Centro Nacional de Investigaciones Oncológicas (CNIO), Madrid, Spain (Mariano Barbacid).
 The Norwegian Radium Hospital Comprehensive Cancer Centre, Oslo, Norway (Anne-Lise Børresen-Dale).
 University of Oxford, Oxford, UK (David Kerr).
 Fondazione IRCCS Istituto Nazionale dei Tumori, Milan, Italy (Marco Pierotti).

The platform will have the following objectives.

- Define and coordinate specific areas for research collaboration.
- Foster global collaboration and healthy competition.
- Harmonise and share infrastructures and competencies.
- Optimise knowledge sharing and agree on quality criteria for all centres.
- Improve training and mobility of researchers.
- Attract young research investigators from all over the world and retain talent in Europe.
- Provide the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries with strategic academic partnerships with long-term R&D objectives.
- To reach out to less developed areas.
- To become the flagship for cancer research in Europe.
- To speak for translational cancer research with a single voice at the European level.

Only a limited number of centres, defined by specific criteria and selected objectively with outside help, should start the process although the platform must have the potential to grow. The platform will not restrain competition between cancer centres, but should instead boost collaboration in order to achieve high quality translational research. The platform shall be open, flexible, and inclusive so as to accommodate more centres in the future. To achieve this aim, mechanisms

for dissemination of knowledge and strategies to centres outside the platform have been proposed.

This paradigm shift, which is unprecedented in Europe, has been catalyzed by the commitment and shared vision of basic and clinical researchers. Establishing such cutting-edge, world-class infrastructure is expected to accelerate the translation of basic discoveries into clinical applications, improve diagnosis and care of cancer patients, and will stand as a pillar of the European Research Area (ERA) in the years to come.

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