

MEPs call for heart disease to be recognised as the main side effect of cancer treatment

Topics: Cardiovascular disease, cancer, policy, research

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Brussels, 9 December 2021: The MEP Heart Group and Challenge Cancer Intergroup have joined forces to urge for more action on cancer and cardiovascular comorbidities and complications.

The appeal comes as the two European Parliament groups co-host a meeting today outlining the interactions between cancer and cardiovascular disease (CVD) and the opportunities to improve outcomes for patients.¹

“Cancer and cardiovascular disease are the leading causes of death in the European Union and place many kinds of burden on patients and their families. The EU is implementing numerous initiatives to reduce the impact of these diseases on the quality of life of EU citizens. These include Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan, the EU pharmaceutical strategy and the Horizon Europe Cancer Mission,” said Sandra Gallina, Director General of the European Commission DG SANTE, the keynote speaker at the event.

Although commonly considered completely separate diseases, CVD and cancer share common modifiable and non-modifiable risk factors that predispose people to both conditions. These common risk factors are associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular complications during cancer therapy, with CVD being the most prevalent comorbidity.² The cardiovascular consequences of cancer treatment often limit the ability to treat these patients effectively, thereby compromising optimal care, and there is growing concern that the adverse effects may lead to premature morbidity and death among cancer survivors.³ Cancer patients are also at risk of excess deaths due to the impact of COVID-19, with cardiovascular conditions being some of the most common additional underlying health problems that may contribute to this risk.⁴

The MEP Heart Group and Challenge Cancer Intergroup therefore urge the European Commission to acknowledge CVD as the most prevalent cancer comorbidity and position cancer and its cardiovascular complications as a central component of EU policy, legislation, and research funding.

Priority should be given to the following actions:

Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan

- Via the Knowledge Centre on Cancer, collect, publish and deploy data intelligence on cardiovascular complications during cancer treatment and survivorship.
- Include acute and long-term cardiovascular side effects of cancer treatment in the Cancer Survivor Smartcard set to be launched as part of the Better Life for Cancer Patients Initiative.
- Incorporate cardio-oncology as a core component of a multidisciplinary cancer training programme.
- Invest in and further support prevention and early detection strategies to ensure equitable access to holistic, multidisciplinary, and patient-centred care pathways involving all relevant stakeholders.

Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe

- Ensure that new definitions and initiatives connected to unmet medical need, reflect needs arising from cancer cardiovascular comorbidities and quality of life.

- Advance the agenda of patient-reported outcomes and post-market surveillance to increase knowledge of, and response to, cardiovascular complications resulting from cancer treatment.
- Support the development of registries to accurately record all medications taken by patients with cancer and other comorbidities to improve understanding of drug interactions and use these data to prevent potential toxicities.

Horizon Europe and EU4Health funding programmes

- Support transnational collaborative research on cancer and cardiovascular comorbidities through the Cancer Mission, Horizon Europe, EU4Health and Innovative Health Initiative.
- Leverage, create where needed, and connect interoperable registries between Member States to monitor the cardiovascular complications of cancer treatment under the EU4Health programme.

It is time to shine a light on the long-term well-being and quality of life of cancer patients by addressing the cardiovascular toxicities of cancer treatment. Careful analysis of the needs of these patients will pave the way for preventive strategies for early detection and management of potential side effects.

The full statement is available [HERE](#).

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Note to editor:

The event was organised by the European Society of Cardiology, the European Heart Network, the European Cancer Organisation, and the European Cancer Patient Coalition.

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References

¹European Parliament [joint event](#) on cancer-related cardiovascular complications and comorbidities on 9 December 2021.

²Balic M, Hilbe W, Gusel S, *et al.* Prevalence of comorbidity in cancer patients scheduled for systemic anticancer treatment in Austria. *Magazine of European Medical Oncology*. 2019; 12:290–296.

³Sturgeon KM, Deng L, Bluethmann SM, *et al.* A population-based study of cardiovascular disease mortality risk in US cancer patients. *Eur Heart J*. 2019;40:3889–3897.

⁴Lai AG, Pasea L, Banerjee A, *et al.* Estimated impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cancer services and excess 1-year mortality in people with cancer and multimorbidity: near real-time data on cancer care, cancer deaths and a population-based cohort study. *BMJ Open*. 2020;10:e043828.