

The Price of Successful Research

an introduction by

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Professor John Smyth is President of the Federation of European Cancer Societies (FECS) (also known as the European Cancer Organisation). Having trained in medical oncology in London and at the US National Cancer Institute he has for the past 25 years held the Inaugural Chair of Medical Oncology in the University of Edinburgh. His major research interest is the development and assessment of new drugs and he is Chairman of the Scientific Advisory Committee for Oncology for the UK Licensing authorities, and a member of the Oncology Advisory Group of the EMEA. He has played a major part in the development of oncology in Europe and served as a past-president of the European Society of Medical Oncology. He has published over 300 papers on a wide variety of oncology issues, and is Editor-in-Chief of the *European Journal of Cancer*.

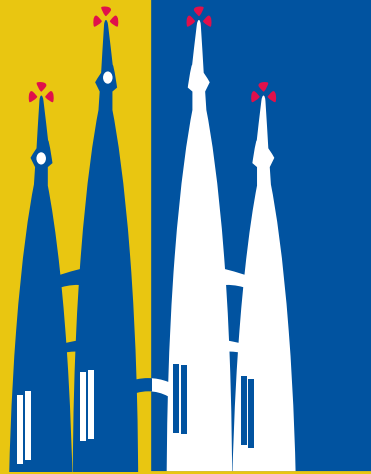
Ironically, after several decades of intensive research but much criticism from the public at large for failure to progress the outcomes of cancer, we are now facing the problem of prioritising new methods of diagnosis and treatment – the very consequences of successful research that the world cannot afford!

In recent years there have at long last been truly outstanding developments in cancer management that bring us at the beginning of the 21st century to a range of new possibilities for the diagnosis and management of cancers; but no society in the developed world has the resources to make all of these treatments available to everyone in need.

The papers in this issue of *European Oncological Disease* highlight some of the important developments in, for example, the use of radiotherapy for breast cancer using intra-operative radiation and recent advances in image-guided radiation therapy. The papers on gastrointestinal stromal tumours emphasise the very rapid development of treatments for a disease entity that was rarely spoken of until the development of molecularly focused therapy with imatinib. The search for more specific tumour markers is an area of intense research activity and there are papers reporting developments in this, for both diagnosis and monitoring therapy. The field of supportive care quite rightly attracts more and more interest and there are papers on the consequences of anaemia in cancer patients, and the use of bisphosphonates for the treatment of bone pain in elderly patients.

The academic community continue to clamour for more funds for cancer research yet clinical research in general and trials in particular are more cumbersome to initiate and infinitely more expensive to conduct than at any time in the past. Information available to patients through the Internet continually encourages patients to correctly demand more and more of the latest available therapies – but somebody has to pay. Setting priorities in healthcare in general and cancer in particular is going to present one of the great social dilemmas in the next decade. How can professionals contribute to this priority setting? One obvious way is by meeting to debate the complex issues involved. The Federation of European Cancer Societies (FECS) is unique in representing all the professional disciplines involved in cancer management and, in response to the challenges referred to, FECS is expanding to provide a comprehensive platform for oncologists, nurses, cancer researchers and patient representatives to discuss how to approach these complex translations of science into healthcare improvement.

The flagship ECCO meetings provide a bi-annual forum for presenting the latest results of research, and also educational and training opportunities, but over and above this FECS will provide a forum for discussion and debate. Politicians and healthcare providers do listen to professionals if they speak with consensus – but ultimately it is patients and their advocates who have the loudest voice. In the coming years FECS will be the forum where professionals, politicians, patients and their advocates meet to discuss, debate and hopefully progress this daunting but unavoidable challenge. ■



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