

EUROPEAN CANCER PATIENT CONGRESS – RIGA  
18<sup>th</sup> March 2022

**The European Code of Cancer Practice**  
**By Kathy Oliver**

**SLIDE 1 – COVER**

**SLIDE 2 – ARTICLE 25**

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and **medical care and necessary social services.**”

These are the words of Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – and they provide us with a highly relevant and poignant reminder of how precious these rights are when we consider what has been happening in the world in the last 22 brutal days.

I’m going to tell you briefly about the European Code of Cancer Practice. But first, here is just a bit of background information about some of the work on cancer inequalities done by the European Cancer Organisation, E.C.O., who have overseen the creation of the Code.

**SLIDE 3 – INEQUALITIES NETWORK 1**

The European Cancer Organisation has created an Inequalities Network which drives consensus, presents policy recommendations and solutions, and shares best practice regarding the challenges of inequalities across Europe.

We all know that these inequalities may arise because of significant disparities in the quality of care and patient outcomes across Europe - the East-West divide. Or they may arise because of variations in providing best practice. We know that there are also delayed uptakes of innovation, different levels of health literacy and other factors influencing healthcare inequalities.

**SLIDE 4 – INEQUALITIES NETWORK 2**

The European Cancer Organisation’s Inequalities Network offers key points of advice for national health systems. For example:

- Enshrine the ten key rights of cancer patients described in the European Code of Cancer Practice in healthcare policy in order to deliver equitable cancer care;
- Give a central role to data so that cancer control priorities are optimally identified and developed;
- Treat each patient as an individual based on health status, co-morbidities and their socio-economic and psychosocial situations;
- Create standard treatment pathways to equalise quality cancer care for all.

## **SLIDE 5 - REGISTRY**

And of course, there is the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, an important component of which is the flagship Inequalities Registry which will identify trends, disparities and inequalities between Member States and regions. The Registry is built on an indicator framework to assess countries' progress in cancer prevention and care.

## **SLIDE 6 – CODE**

Now we come to the European Code of Cancer Practice. This is a citizen and patient-centred manifesto of the core requirements for good clinical practice, in order to improve outcomes for all of Europe's cancer patients. The Code has its origins in the European Cancer Patient Bill of Rights, which was launched in the European Parliament on World Cancer Day 2014 and won the prestigious 2018 European Health Award.

The Code sets out a series of ten key overarching rights outlining what cancer patients should expect from their healthcare systems. It's been co-produced by a team of cancer patients, patient advocates and cancer professionals. The rights are organised according to various aspects of the cancer patient journey, from diagnosis to end of life. The ten rights of the Code cover equal access; information; quality/expertise and outcomes; multidisciplinary care; shared decision-making; research and innovation; quality of life; supportive and palliative care; survivorship and rehabilitation, and reintegration into society.

## **SLIDE 7 – CODE DETAILS**

The Code is an empowerment tool, and its plain language content is evidence-based and available in over 20 languages. It is endorsed by many European and national organisations as well as individual cancer centres. The Code can help link clinical guidelines with healthcare services and patient experience. And in some settings, the Code can be used as an aspirational idea against which goals for quality standards, policies and practices are monitored and delivered.

## **SLIDE 8 – EQUAL ACCESS**

As you can see here, each of the ten overarching rights is linked to three questions that a patient, parent, guardian or family may choose to ask their healthcare professionals.

## **SLIDE 9 – JCP BECA**

Our team at the European Cancer Organisation has also published, in the *Journal of Cancer Policy*, a peer-reviewed paper on the European Code of Cancer Practice. This paper provides details of the medical literature and evidence which underpins each of the ten rights in the Code.

Furthermore, the European Parliament established a Special Committee on Beating Cancer called the BECA committee. Over the last year or so, the BECA Committee has investigated the actions and policies that the European Union can support and undertake to fight cancer. The BECA report specifically states that the European Code of Cancer Practice is “an empowering tool to ensure that the best available care is provided to European citizens and patients.”

## **SLIDE 10 - COVID**

The advent of COVID-19 has made the European Code of Cancer Practice even more relevant in terms of cancer patients' rights and outcomes. We all know how the pandemic created an economic crisis, a social crisis and a health crisis. And we all know that COVID has amplified inequalities and created a human rights crisis as well. The pandemic made us again realise just how important patients' rights are, as well as having robust healthcare systems and protected supply lines.

## **SLIDE 11 - CONFLICT**

In addition, all of us continue to witness the current tragic effects of armed conflict on healthcare in Ukraine. A paper by Dr Mohammad Jawad and colleagues tells us that: "Armed conflicts may increase cancer incidence, complications and mortality... by disrupting patients seeking care and the delivery of all aspects of oncological care. Additional impacts on cancer services may result from sudden demographic shifts associated with armed conflict and forced migration (internally displaced persons or refugees). This may increase late diagnoses for potentially curable site-specific cancers, and abandonment of treatment or sub-optimal treatment, all of which increase the burden of cancer on patients and health services."

## **SLIDE 12 – ASCO ECO**

Finally, and just to let you know, the European Cancer Organisation (E.CO.), in partnership with the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) have come together, supported by dozens of other major organisations, to create a Special Network on Ukraine. This network, already up and running, is signposting people to existing resources in order to amplify the incredible efforts of others in gathering valuable information, and identifying and addressing the needs of Ukrainian cancer patients.

Signposting is done in a number of different languages including Ukrainian, Russian, English, Polish, Slovak, Romanian, Hungarian and Czech.

The website address is [europeancancer.org/help](http://europeancancer.org/help) and if anyone listening to this presentation has new links and resources which E.C.O. and ASCO can promote, please email them to [ukraine@europeancancer.org](mailto:ukraine@europeancancer.org)

## **SLIDE 13 – END**

Thanks for your attention.