



**Press release: 13th European Health Forum Gastein, 6 – 9 October 2010**

## **New data: Unforeseen hurdles can increase European inequalities in access to optimal care for patients with rare cancers**

*Previously underestimated hurdles such as exchange rate fluctuations and their impact on prices of new medicines may limit the access of patients with rare cancers to effective treatments, experts said at the European Health Forum Gastein. A new study recommends that EU and national authorities address this issue proactively when designing regulatory frameworks for pricing and reimbursement of medicines.*

**Bad Hofgastein, 7 October 2010** – Patients’ access to new effective treatments for rare cancers, -- which represent more than 20% of all cancer cases -- may be undermined by previously underestimated hurdles, according to a new study released today at the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG).

The EHFG is the most important conference on health care policy in the EU. This year it has attracted about 600 decision-makers from more than 40 countries in the fields of health care policy, research, science, and business as well as from patients’ organizations.

The study explores the impact of exchange rate variability on the price of new medicines. Documenting the effect of the economic crisis, the study identifies new and unexpected factors which play a role in creating variability in access to care across Europe when applying the common practice of referencing international prices.

### **Risk of magnifying differentials in standards of care across Europe**

The author, Dr. Panos Kanavos, Senior Lecturer at the London School of Economics presented the new study’s findings during a workshop at the European Health Forum in Gastein. Dr Kanavos explained: “Our research has demonstrated that exchange rate fluctuations create unintended distortions in the pricing of pharmaceuticals, through international price referencing. All healthcare stakeholders desire a stable and predictable pricing environment. If this problem is not addressed, for example, by limiting price referencing to the Euro zone, it runs the risk of magnifying differentials in standards of care across Europe”.

The report recommends that EU and national authorities address this issue proactively when designing regulatory frameworks for pricing and reimbursement of medicines.

Commenting on the report, Dr. Bengt Jönsson, Professor at Stockholm School of Economics, said: “Variations in patient access across Europe are an increasingly important challenge for European and national health policy and must be addressed through informed and rational decision-making”. These remarks reflect Dr. Jönsson’s own findings in his forthcoming report, which explores patient access to treatment in haematological malignancies, including rare leukaemias.

### **For cancer patients, time is not an ally, but an enemy**

Dr. Kanavos’ study provided the starting point for a discussion among a workshop panel consisting of Dr. Kristina Andrekute, President of the Lithuanian Rare Cancer Patients Association, Nick Fahy of the European Commission and Ulf Staginnus, Head of Pricing and Health Economics at Novartis Oncology Region Europe. The panel addressed the extent to which access inequalities impact patients’ lives, ways to improve patient outcomes and standards of care in rare cancers, as well as current European Union initiatives aimed at fighting cancer.

From the perspective of patients as well as doctors, Dr. Andrekute concluded, “in rare cancers, every step from diagnosis through to treatment is a challenge for a patient and their doctor too. Delays are common and they only make the process more difficult. Time is not an ally, but an enemy.”

While applauding European initiatives, such as the “European Partnership for Action Against Cancer”, the subsequent discussion among the workshop participants recognised the need for a holistic regulatory approach supporting the fight against rare cancers. The audience brought together leading experts from research, professional and patient communities together with representatives from the pharmaceutical industry.

*Source: Dr. Panos Kanavos: “External Price Referencing for Pharmaceuticals and the Impact of Exchange Rate Variability on the Prices of New Medicines”, London School of Economics*

*Workshop 6 “Optimising care for rare cancers”. Thursday, 7 October 2010. Organised by Novartis Oncology*

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