



## **Media information**

### **Phase III study reports a new way of identifying patients at high risk of dysphagia during treatment of head and neck cancer**

*Identification of patients that are at highest risk for late and persistent dysphagia may help to provide them with preventive measures and to better tailor radiotherapy intensification*

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on innovative approaches in Head and Neck Oncology (ICHNO), Dr Hanna Rahbek Mortensen and colleagues at hospitals and institutes in Denmark presented results from a large prospective trial, the DAHANCA 6 & 7 study. The study, conducted across the country, investigated risk factors for developing dysphagia (swallowing dysfunction), after undergoing radiotherapy treatment for a head & neck cancer. “We followed 1,476 patients with squamous cell carcinoma of the head and neck and found out the existence of factors related to the cancer itself, to the patient and to the treatment influencing the development of dysphagia,” said Dr Mortensen.

Dysphagia may be acute (starting in direct association with treatment) or late (starting months to years after treatment). Risk factors for developing severe acute dysphagia were large tumours, spreading of cancer cells to the lymph nodes, swallowing problems at the time of diagnosis, 6 treatments per week and tumour location other than the vocal cords. Risk factors for developing late dysphagia were large tumours, swallowing problems at the time of diagnosis and tumour location other than the vocal cords.

83% of all head & neck cancer patients develop some kind of dysphagia, but this predictive model will have a major impact on patient quality of life.

“These results are very important,” said Dr JA Langendijk from the University Medical Center of Groningen, The Netherlands. “Today, with the increasing use of intensity modulated radiotherapy (IMRT), the dose to the salivary glands is reduced resulting in lower risks on xerostomia (dry mouth). However, swallowing dysfunction is remaining an important side effect following irradiation in the head and neck region. Therefore, the identification of patients that are at highest risk for dysphagia, in particular late and persistent, is of major importance as this will help us to provide them with preventive measures”, said Dr Langendijk.

Gastric tubes insertion and swallowing exercises could be prescribed and prevent malnutrition and weight loss. “This study will be very helpful to improve the quality of life of patients,” noted Dr Mortensen. “Indeed, these measures at an early stage of the treatment will considerably reduce swallowing disorders”.

But the results will also lead to a better treatment. “Dysphagia is a limiting factor for further intensification of head and neck radiotherapy. This is why the knowledge provided here may help us to better tailor treatments for the patients: it may allow us to increase the intensity of the treatment while maintaining their quality of life,” concluded Dr Mortensen.

## Note to Editors

### About the European Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology

ESTRO, the European Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology, was founded in 1980. Today with 5000 members, the society supports the role of radiation oncology in the multimodality treatment of cancer to improve patients' care.

ESTRO's principal objectives and activities are to:

- Promote the international exchange of scientific information, research and dissemination of outcomes on radiotherapy and oncology and related scientific fields.
- Organise congresses and conferences covering all aspects of radiation oncology and the multidisciplinary treatment of cancer with a state-of-the-art scientific programme.
- Provide educational courses and materials (publications, e-learning...) in radiation oncology and promoting multidisciplinary education in oncology.
- Establish relationships and network and encourage co-operation with international, national societies as well as professional bodies and industry partners in the field of radiation oncology.

To find out more about ESTRO, please visit: [www.estro.org](http://www.estro.org)

### About the European Society for Medical Oncology

The European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) is the leading European professional organization committed to advancing the specialty of medical oncology and promoting a multidisciplinary approach to cancer treatment and care.

ESMO's mission is to advance cancer care and cure through fostering and disseminating good science that leads to better medicine and determines best practice.

As a trusted organization with 35 years of experience, ESMO serves its members and the oncology community through: a brand of excellence in post-graduate oncology education and training; leadership in transforming evidence-based research into standards of cancer care in Europe; dedicated efforts to foster a more favorable environment for scientific research; innovative international platforms to share expertise, best practices and disseminate the most up-to-date scientific research to as wide an audience as possible.

ESMO's scientific journal, *Annals of Oncology*, ranks among the top clinical oncology journals worldwide. ESMO events are the meeting place in Europe for medical oncologists to update their knowledge, to network and to exchange ideas.

To find out more about ESMO, please visit: [www.esmo.org](http://www.esmo.org)

### About the European Head and Neck Society

The European Head and Neck Society (EHNS) was formally established in 2006 and counts 1500 members today. Its intent is to promote exchange of knowledge in all aspects of head and neck neoplastic diseases and to promote the highest standards of research, education and training, disease prevention and patient care. It is a multidisciplinary body bringing together clinicians (e.g., head and neck/oral/plastic surgeons, radiation therapists, medical oncologists, imaging specialists, pathologists), other health professionals (e.g., speech therapists, cancer nurses, psychologists, physiotherapists, dieticians, social workers), and basic scientists involved in any aspect of

Head and Neck Oncology. Every other year EHNS organizes a European Conference on Head and Neck Oncology (ECHNO).

The EHNS is registered as an international non-profit association under Belgian law. It is composed of individual persons, national and multi-national societies, associated study groups oriented towards head and neck oncology research, training and treatment throughout Europe and elsewhere in the world.

To find our more about EHNS, please visit: [www.ehns.org](http://www.ehns.org)

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