



## European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) and ESTRO Cancer Foundation (ECF) Launch New Research Initiative to Identify and Address Barriers to Accessing Radiotherapy

*With support from AstraZeneca, research aims to close gaps in access to high-quality radiotherapy for lung cancer patients in Europe*

**25 November 2020**, Brussels, Belgium - The European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) and the ESTRO Cancer Foundation (ECF) announce the launch of a new research initiative to explore challenges to the uptake of radiotherapy for lung cancer patients in Europe.

Supported by a grant from AstraZeneca, this project will use qualitative and quantitative research to characterize the radiotherapy access landscape in Europe and develop policy recommendations to improve patient outcomes by closing gaps in access to high-quality radiotherapy.

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer related death globally and in Europe.<sup>1,2</sup> In 2018 alone, lung cancer was responsible for almost 400,000 deaths in Europe.<sup>3</sup> Radiotherapy is a critical component of the care pathway for many lung cancer patients, aiming to achieve cure in early stage disease and with the potential to relieve symptoms in fully metastatic patients.<sup>4</sup> Although radiotherapy is recommended for more than 50% of cancer patients,<sup>5,6</sup> ESTRO has previously established that only 70% of the patients who could benefit from radiotherapy are getting access to this critical cancer treatment in Europe.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on oncology services across Europe is likely to have a prolonged effect on access to radiotherapy. Many radiology centres across Europe have reported an average decline of 25% in cancer patient numbers.<sup>7</sup>

“Despite being the standard of care for many cancer types, radiotherapy is currently underutilized. If every cancer patient who needed radiotherapy had access to it by 2035, almost one million more lives could be saved every year worldwide,”<sup>8</sup> said ESTRO past-president Prof. Yolande Lievens, Professor in Radiation Oncology, Ghent University Hospital and Ghent University and Josep Maria Borrás, Professor at University of Barcelona, Department of Clinical Sciences. “This new project is part of our ongoing commitment to reveal and eliminate the barriers to radiotherapy. By focusing on lung cancer, we hope to gain a deep understanding of the care pathway and be able to make a meaningful impact to improve patient access to radiotherapy for this cancer.”

“This project comes at a crucial time, as scientific advances reinforce the need for patient access to the multimodal approaches that improve cancer outcomes,” said Giovanni Melillo, VP and Head of Immuno-Oncology Global Medical Affairs, AstraZeneca. “By better understanding why access to radiotherapy is limited, and by supporting health systems to improve patient access, we hope to improve the lives of patients living with cancer, and ultimately eliminate cancer as a cause of death.”

A variety of contributing factors have already been identified that hinder uptake of radiotherapy, including limited health system resources, lack of inclusion in national cancer care pathways, and inequalities to access.<sup>9</sup> Today, more than 40% of high-income countries do not address radiotherapy in their national cancer or non-communicable disease plans.<sup>10</sup>

ESTRO/ECF's new project will identify and address the causes and barriers to accessing radiotherapy along the lung cancer patient journey through:

- Determining the optimal evidence-based utilization of radiotherapy for lung cancer in Europe
- A review of existing literature on actual patterns of care for lung cancer radiotherapy
- A survey of radiation oncologists in Europe to understand how they use radiotherapy in the treatment of lung cancer in their clinical practice
- A series of interviews with clinicians and other stakeholders exploring their perceptions of current challenges in accessing radiotherapy

ESTRO is working with policy makers and payors to ensure that the importance of high-quality radiotherapy is recognised, and that consistent national policies are put in place to ensure optimal access and uptake to radiotherapy by helping countries prioritise radiotherapy as an evidence-based treatment strategy.



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#### About ECF

The ECF was launched by ESTRO in 2012. Its ambition is to ensure that every cancer patient has access to appropriate and personalised cancer care. The ECF's projects are designed to raise awareness and understanding of radiotherapy. It is instrumental in facilitating research and making resulting scientific data accessible and understandable to everyone. For more information, visit: [www.mariecurielegacy.org](http://www.mariecurielegacy.org)

#### About ESTRO

ESTRO was founded in 1980, ESTRO as a non-profit and scientific organisation that fosters the role of Radiation Oncology in order to improve patients' care in the multimodality treatment of cancer. With over 7300 members in and outside Europe, ESTRO supports all the Radiation Oncology professionals in their daily practice: Radiation Oncologists, Medical Physicists, Radiobiologists and RTTs (Radiation Therapists) and the wider oncology community. "Radiation oncology. Optimal health for all, together" is the ESTRO Vision. To do so, ESTRO promotes innovation, research, and dissemination of science through its congresses, special meetings, educational courses and publications.

[www.estro.org](http://www.estro.org)

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