

World Cancer Day 2021: A recognition of the COVID-19 heroes supporting and caring for cancer patients around the world

Since its founding in 1933, one of the main objectives of the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) is to convene global leaders in cancer control—from treatment centers, researchers, patient groups, organizations carrying out diagnostics, screening and prevention programmes—to better fight cancer together. This also remains a core priority for the organization in these surreal times as we adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has presented huge challenges for cancer professionals, patients and cancer societies, globally. In 2020, a questionnaire-based survey was conducted by UICC amongst 1200 members in 172 countries to better understand and assess the impact of the pandemic on their operations and activities. Of the 108 organizations who responded from 55 countries across different income settings and regions, 77% (83) reported reductions in income and 80% (86) reported reductions in activities and services.¹ Despite these setbacks, the cancer community has shown tremendous resilience, with many of our members continuing advocacy within their national settings to ensure that essential cancer services, including Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccination, screening and prompt access to diagnostic and treatment services remain open and accessible for patients.

Conducting and publishing robust scientific studies during a pandemic is critical. The public at large is understandably eager to ascertain as much scientific information as possible about COVID-19 prognosis, diagnosis, treatment and care and its impact on cancer care. As ever, the communication of study results in a clear and transparent manner is critical to ensure that people have access to reliable information and that decision makers have the evidence to support policy changes. It has been inspiring to witness the tremendous efforts made by researchers, scientists and health professionals in fighting the pandemic. The medical breakthroughs in research on SARS-CoV-2 undertaken through international collaboration have meant that, finally, vaccination is available and being progressively rolled out around the world.

For me, as a practising oncologist and researcher for over 30 years, science and innovation to support progress in cancer control is close to my heart and will form an important part of my presidency. The cancer community has been making well-earned gains in its fight to reduce the cancer burden worldwide. We have seen exciting new advances in cancer diagnostics, treatments and precision medicine that include liquid biopsies, robotic surgery, advanced radiotherapy, immunotherapy and targeted therapies that hold great promise in diagnosing cancer at an earlier stage and expanding treatment

possibilities for patients. Research and innovation in health, equity and development can lead to more productive, healthy and fulfilling lives many more and help in our efforts to achieve the vision of Universal Health Coverage (UHC), where cancer services are available, accessible and affordable to all those who need them.

While innovation is generally used to refer to Research & Development for new medicines and health technologies, innovation also refers to creative ways to organize and deliver healthcare, manage information, respond effectively to the needs of providers and users, develop business models for increased productivity and sustainability and ensure that vulnerable or disadvantaged groups become healthier through solutions that promote equity. UICC believes that the cancer community must continue to partner with and encourage governments around the world to invest in cancer control and be innovative in their approach so they can better understand their cancer burden and improve prevention, early detection and treatment of cancer. With this in mind, the World Cancer Leaders' Summit (WCLS) scheduled in Boston, USA, in October 2021 with the theme “Driving innovation to advance cancer control equitably” will explore questions such as how innovation in cancer control can be assessed in different contexts including within a value-based care model, and what needs to be considered when implementing innovative policies, practices and technologies from a health systems perspective. The WCLS will also draw on the experiences of Summit participants in responding to the impact of COVID-19 on cancer services and health systems more broadly and how innovative approaches can facilitate continued care for people with cancer.

This virtual issue of the *International Journal of Cancer* has been curated especially for World Cancer Day—an international day conceptualised and led by the UICC and marked on February 4 every year to raise awareness of cancer and to encourage its prevention, detection and treatment. The focus of the virtual issue is on COVID-19 and Cancer and includes research studies on patient care, the effects of COVID-19 on cancer patients, biological insights and the importance of cancer control policy during a pandemic.²

This World Cancer Day on 4th February 2021 is celebrated with the theme “I am and I will,” a reminder that each one of us can play a role in reducing the impact of cancer. Recognizing the unique challenges the world has confronted with COVID-19, World Cancer Day 2021 is dedicated to the courage and achievements of people living with cancer and their families, as well as the nurses, doctors,

researchers, volunteers, advocates and others who care for them and work on their behalf. UICC and its members will highlight their stories, their battles and their successes, and show the innovative responses of cancer organizations around the world to the pandemic as they continue with efforts to maintain progress in cancer care. The pandemic has shown how individuals, organizations and governments unite in a common cause to great effect. This World Cancer Day will also engage people from nations around the world in a collective effort to make sure that the voice of cancer is heard loud and clear and to show that together our actions matter.

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