

United European Gastroenterology Position Paper Digestive cancers: Why actions are needed?

May 2017

- The paper gives an overview of the burden of digestive cancers within Europe and outlines activities to improve the current state of art.

What is digestive cancer?

- The digestive cancer is a term for the group of cancers that affect the digestive system. This include for instance esophagus, stomach, pancreas, liver, bowel or colon.
- Digestive cancers affect both men and women.

State of art in Europe

- Digestive cancers are the leading cause of cancer-related death in Europe. They are the most common type of cancer in Europe among men and the second most common in women after breast cancer.
- With a total incidence of 684,000 cases in the 27 EU member states in 2012, digestive cancers accounted for 30% of all new cancers among men and 25% among women.
- In 2017, digestive cancers are estimated to become the second (colorectal) and third (pancreatic) leading cause of death from cancer in the EU behind lung cancer.¹
- Being the second most common cause of cancer-related death in Europe, colorectal cancer is the most common type of digestive cancer. Colorectal cancer can effectively be prevented by population-based screening programmes. Yet there are vast inequalities in colorectal cancer screening program design and participation across Europe ranging from 20% (Croatia) to 70% (Finland).²
- Colorectal cancer has the third highest economic costs in the EU amounting to €13 billion, which is 10% of overall cancer costs to healthcare systems. Lung cancer costs amount to 15%; breast cancer to 12 %.³
- Pancreatic cancer it's the deadliest cancer, with an overall 5 years survival of about 5% (data that it's the same for almost 50 years). By 2025, deaths from pancreatic cancer across Europe are projected to have increased by almost 50% since 2010. Yet knowledge of the disease and how to tackle it is alarmingly low. Symptoms can often be hard to identify, making it difficult to diagnose early and in time for surgery.⁴

¹UEG press release: <https://www.ueg.eu/press/releases/ueg-press-release/article/pancreatic-cancer-set-to-become-third-biggest-cancer-killer-in-eu-next-year/>; White Book, Survey of digestive health in Europeook p. 127.

²UEG Leaflet:

https://www.ueg.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/images/Press/Images_2016/Screening.pdf

³The Lancet; [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanonc/article/PIIS1470-2045\(13\)70442-X/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanonc/article/PIIS1470-2045(13)70442-X/abstract)

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Calls for action:

- The European Commission is called upon to enhance initiatives on digestive cancers, particularly pancreatic cancer, within the remit of the upcoming “Innovative Partnership on Action against Cancer” project.⁵
- Guidelines for quality assurance in colorectal cancer screening and diagnosis, which were launched in 2010 by the European Commission to be updated.
- Advocate for implementation of population-based colorectal cancer screening programmes in all European countries; and to increase participation-rates in these screening programmes.
- Enhance initiatives that raise awareness for colorectal cancer screening in the EU population, particularly in the high-risk population with family history in cancer; to promote healthy lifestyle with the view to reduce cancer risks as stipulated in the WHO European Code Against Cancer.⁶
- Funding in pancreatic cancer research to be enhanced as well as a need for targeted EU policies for pancreatic cancer.

About UEG

- United European Gastroenterology, is a professional non-profit organisation combining all the leading European societies concerned with digestive diseases
- Our goal is to promote digestive health in Europe throughout facilitating the awareness on digestive cancers prevention, initiatives on chronic diseases and healthy diet. UEG further advocates for increased funding and other support from the EU into the area of digestive diseases.

⁵FYI <http://www.cancercontrol.eu/news/141/26/Cancon-joint-action-ends-23-February/d,news>

<http://www.cancercontrol.eu/news/5/26/New-joint-action-launched/d,news>

<http://www.cancercontrol.eu/news/150/26/Final-version-of-Guide-available/d,news>

⁶ <https://cancer-code-europe.iarc.fr/index.php/en/ecac-12-ways/diet-recommendation>