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29 September 2013 [European Society for Medical Oncology \(ESMO\)](#)

Lugano, Switzerland, 29th September 2013- Many large European countries may be facing a future shortage of medical oncologists without realizing it - a situation that could have dire consequences for cancer patients, the European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) has warned.

At the European Cancer Congress today, researchers reported new data that looks at the projected number of medical oncologists in Europe and tries to predict if European countries will face a shortage of medical oncologists by 2020.

Medical oncologists are cancer specialists who focus on treating cancer using chemotherapy, targeted drugs and other medical therapies. They work together with surgeons, radiation oncologists and other specialists to deliver multi-disciplinary care to cancer patients.

The number of people who develop cancers in greater Europe is expected to grow to 3.4 million each year by 2020, a 20% increase from 2002. It is vital that countries increase their numbers of cancer specialists to match that growth, ESMO warns.

“There is increasing evidence demonstrating that limited access to a medical oncologist can lead to less timely access to anticancer treatments and therefore have a negative effect on outcomes,” says Raffaele Califano, Chair of the ESMO Young Oncologists Committee and consultant medical oncologist at the Cancer Research UK Department of Medical Oncology, The Christie NHS Foundation Trust, Manchester.

The new data reported at the conference show that adequate data on the projected numbers of medical oncologists was only available for 12 of 27 European Union nations.

“Looking at the available data, it seems that there will not be any shortage of medical oncologists in Central European and Western European countries by 2020, but the data was

not available for several countries with large populations such as the Russian Federation, Turkey, Spain, Poland and Greece,” said Dr Califano.

It is also important to notice that this data is based on cancer incidence and not cancer prevalence; furthermore the current economic crisis might have an influence on the number of doctors migrating to other countries.

ESMO believes that continuous monitoring from official authorities is the only way to ensure that the ratio of new cases of cancer to medical oncologists is adequate. This data would allow specialist-training programmes to be modified and new posts for medical oncologists created to maintain adequate numbers.

“This is the only way to make sure that excellent and safe standards of care for cancer patients can be maintained,” Califano said.

“We believe the next step is to endeavor to collect data from the non-surveyed countries in order to have definitive information about the expected change in number of medical oncologists across all EU countries. This will help to understand fully if Europe is ready to face the new cancer cases predicted by 2020 and appropriate resources are in place,” Califano said.

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