

Defending medical oncology to assure quality care for cancer patients

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Medical oncologists have a vital role to play in cancer care, particularly as treatments become ever more complex, a new position statement [1] from the European Society for Medical Oncology says.

Medical oncologists are specialist cancer physicians trained to provide treatment with drugs, spanning from the old one-fits-all chemotherapy to newer targeted agents or immunotherapies attacking the disease at its core.

ESMO's aim with the position statement, published today in the *Annals of Oncology*, is to guarantee to Europe's growing number of cancer patients access to optimal treatment, says Razvan Popescu, Chair of the ESMO National Representatives and Membership Committee, main sponsor of the paper.

"There are many complex decisions to be made around cancer treatment, and recent scientific advances are making the provision of optimal care even more challenging," said Popescu. "Only [medical oncology](#) training prepares physicians to deal with this complexity."

Medical oncology as a specialty has existed since the 1960s. It was formally recognised in the European Union as an independent medical specialty and professional qualification only in March 2011 [2].

The new ESMO position paper takes the speciality a step further, by outlining formally for the first time the role of medical oncologists.

Developed in consultation with medical oncologists and professional organisations across Europe, endorsed by all medical oncology societies in Europe, it represents a consensus view of the medical oncologist's place in the treatment of cancer.

"We hope that this position paper will be useful to individual countries in their discussions for the recognition of medical oncology as a specialty where it is not yet recognized and to defend the profession where possible challenges arise," Popescu said.

The ESMO statement establishes, among others, what the internationally recognised standard of education and training should be for a medical oncologist. "These standards will help ensure that patients receive the best possible care and that professionals achieve qualifications that will be recognised across Europe," said Popescu.

"By bringing attention to the role of medical oncology, ESMO hopes to improve the treatment of patients across Europe," said ESMO President Martine Piccart.

"Cancer is a complex disease, and quality cancer care should be provided by multidisciplinary teams of medical professionals, including radiation oncologists and surgeons," Piccart said.

"Medical oncologists are a core member of such teams, offering a patient-centred holistic approach to quality [cancer care](#) that aims to guide and support the patient through the entire 'cancer journey'," Piccart said.

More information: [1] Popescu RA, Schäfer R, Califano R et al. The current and future role of the medical oncologist in the professional care for cancer patients: a position paper by the European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO). *Ann Oncol* 2013; 25: 9-15:

[annonc.oxfordjournals.org/cont ... 25/1/9.full.pdf+html](https://annonc.oxfordjournals.org/cont...25/1/9.full.pdf+html)

[2] [www.esmo.org/Policy/Recognitio ... -of-Medical-Oncology](http://www.esmo.org/Policy/Recognitio...-of-Medical-Oncology)

Provided by European Society for Medical Oncology

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