

'Rare' cancers in the spotlight at major European conference

February 24 2010

More should be done across Europe to ensure that people with rare forms of cancer are not denied access to the best possible treatment, say the organizers of a major European cancer conference to be held in Milan on 9 and 10 March 2010.

"People with rare diseases have the same right to receive proper treatment as all other patients", said Dr. Paolo G. Casali, Head of the [Sarcoma](#) Medical Treatment Unit at the Milan Istituto Nazionale Tumori and co-chair of the ESMO Conference on Sarcoma and GIST. "Yet the sad reality is that access to treatments for rare cancers varies across Europe. And patients with these tumors do not always receive the best possible care."

"Focusing on these forms of cancer can have wider benefits," Dr. Casali added. "Many rare cancers are exceptionally rich of targets for the new molecularly targeted therapies. Sarcomas are an obvious case: they are relatively rare, they can be split into 50-plus subgroups, they have plenty of targets, they are serving as an advanced model for medical oncologists. This Conference highlights all this."

The ESMO Conference on Sarcoma and GIST is part of the European Society for Medical Oncology's strong commitment to cover the newest therapies and address issues related to rare cancers. The conference will present the latest developments in the diagnosis and treatment of a group of rare cancers that affect the body's connective tissues.

Known as soft tissue sarcomas, these tumors can be found in muscle, blood vessels, deep skin tissues, nerves and the tissues around joints. GIST, or gastrointestinal stromal tumour, is a type of sarcoma that originates from the wall of the [gastrointestinal tract](#). Around 50 different kinds of soft-tissue sarcomas have been identified. Altogether, [connective tissue](#) cancers affect about 25,000 people in Europe each year.

"Therapies in sarcomas present many real challenges," said Dr. Paolo Dei Tos Director of the Pathology Unit of the Regional Hospital of Treviso, Italy co-chair of the meeting. "We know that the best treatment results come when we can combine information from biology, pathology and the clinic. The goal of this conference is to improve treatment across Europe by providing a comprehensive overview of the current medical therapy of these diseases."

Around 200 specialists in sarcoma and GIST are expected to attend this niche conference, which is organized by the European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) in cooperation with the Milan Istituto Nazionale Tumori, and with the support of Conticanet, a EU-funded project for clinical research on connective tissue cancers in Europe.

"If we are going to make progress against these diseases in Europe then we need to make a concerted effort to understand them better," said Conticanet's coordinator, Dr. Jean-Yves Blay, who is one co-chair of the conference.

The conference will have a particular focus on the molecular and pathological bases of soft tissue sarcomas and GIST, aiming to give a perspective on the state of the art in medical treatment and what new approaches are coming. Some of the most respected and pioneering experts dealing with these rare cancers will be among the speakers.

"Sarcomas being rare cancers make this meeting a significant expression of ESMO's efforts on rare diseases," said Dr. Casali. "When all the 'rare' tumors are considered as a group, they represent one-fourth of all [cancer](#) cases."

Provided by European Society for Medical Oncology

Citation: 'Rare' cancers in the spotlight at major European conference (2010, February 24)
retrieved 4 February 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-02-rare-cancers-spotlight-major-european.html>

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