

Spotlight on rare tumors in hunt for new cancer treatments

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New breakthrough treatments for the most common cancers could soon come from cutting-edge research into some of the world's rarest tumors.

At the ESMO Conference on Sarcoma and GIST, to be held in Milan, Italy, on 9 and 10 March 2010, researchers and some of the world's leading experts will discuss exciting new science on sarcomas—a group of rare tumors found in muscle, blood vessels, deep skin tissues, nerves and the tissues around joints.

Although these cancers only affect a relatively small number of people, researchers say understanding them could have far wider ramifications.

"Because sarcomas have well-characterized molecular alterations, they are an ideal model for developing new therapies," says conference Co-Chair Dr. Jean-Yves Blay. "Sarcomas represent models for the development of targeted therapies in cancer."

This is a crucial period in sarcoma research, Dr. Blay said. "We are right in the middle of some breakthroughs. Novel treatments are now emerging for a large number of sarcoma types."

"Building on a precise understanding of the molecular biology of these tumors collected over the last decades, it is now possible to develop novel treatments targeting the initial molecular alterations driving these tumors," says Dr. Angelo Paolo Dei Tos, conference Co-Chair. "The aim of this meeting will be to understand these novel strategies for targeted agents in these tumors, with practical consequences in more frequent [tumor](#) types".

"Sarcomas are currently under the spotlight because they lend themselves to be targeted by the newest anticancer drugs. Of course, such new

therapies need to be used in a strategically appropriate way," says conference Co-Chair, Dr. Paolo G Casali. "This requires a deep integrated approach, bringing together highly diverse areas of expertise, from molecular biologists to surgeons, from radiation therapists to medical oncologists. The strong, global faculty of this sarcoma conference reflects ongoing attempts to take up the challenge in this family of rare cancers."

So far, researchers have identified around 50 different kinds of soft-tissue sarcomas. Each of them is rare, although together they affect about 30,000 people in Europe each year. They include GIST, or gastrointestinal stromal tumor, a type of sarcoma that starts in the wall of the gastrointestinal tract.

More than 360 specialists in [sarcoma](#) and GIST are attending the conference, which is organized by the European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) in cooperation with the Milan Istituto Nazionale Tumori, with the support of Conticanet, a EU-funded project for clinical research on connective tissue cancers in Europe, and Eurobonet, the first European network of excellence dedicated to bone tumors.

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.

Provided by European Society for Medical Oncology

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