TIME TO ACT.

Cancer care in a COVID-19 climate—Who can make a difference?

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From policymakers, to manufacturers, to frontline workers, we all have a role to play in the battle against cancer, but we must come together as a united force to succeed. This means collaborating with the healthcare community at every level to face the challenges as one, to effectively care for cancer patients and oncology staff alike.

The COVID-19 crisis has changed the way we collaborate and the way we deliver cancer care. An estimated 100,000 cancer patients are being added to the backlog every month, which European experts say could take at least a year to clear.[1]

That's why it's TIME TO ACT.

The European Cancer Organisation (ECO), with the support of BD, has launched the TIME TO ACT campaign to get cancer care back on track, highlighting the need to address undiagnosed and backlogged patients.

To do so, everyone must play their part.

The patient

Patients know themselves better than anyone, and they can help with early diagnosis if they know what to look for, and when to seek help.

Supporting patients in learning to be the experts of their own bodies through educational guides, treatment preparation and self-screening tools could be an essential key in reducing the amount of undiagnosed cancer cases.

As part of the TIME TO ACT campaign, the ECO is curating a hub of resources, tools and support from international, European and national organisations to equip patients and patient advocates with knowledge on their diagnosis and empower them along their cancer journey.

The healthcare worker

Only when healthcare workers (HCWs) are properly cared for can they provide proper care to patients. Protecting HCWs from workplace hazards is essential in reinstating safe, efficient cancer care and reducing the current backlog.

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HCWs working directly with chemotherapy risk exposure to hazardous substances. A 2016 study shows that more than 20 million HCWs in Europe are exposed to carcinogenic, mutagenic, reprotoxic and cytotoxic hazardous drugs every year.[2] In fact, work-related cancers are the leading cause of European occupational deaths, accounting for 52% of them in 2017.[3]

Protecting HCWs from cytotoxic and hazardous chemical exposure and resultant ill-health means there are more HCWs able to provide cancer care. This can be supported by:

- Remote clinical service and product training to maintain and increase capacity.
- Implementing systematic environmental monitoring procedures that are capable of identifying risk of occupational exposure within minutes.

Besides the physical hazards, HCWs are also at risk of developing mental health issues due to the nature of their work environment. The ECO reported that in 2020, at the height of the pandemic, 4 out of 10 HCWs felt burnt out and 3 out of 10 reportedly showed signs of clinical depression.[1] With current workforce shortages,[4] the current burden on HCWs is substantial.

What more can be done to keep our HCWs healthy?

The policy maker

Proper protection from the physical and psychological risks of the healthcare workplace relies heavily on the decision makers at both regional and local levels.

The ECO's Network on Workforce was established with the goal of bringing experts together to address European-level policy requirements to ensure better cancer care for patients, and better protection for HCWs.

The Network on Workforce addresses the need for greater European policy action in HCW safety in a few notable categories:[4]

- Improved HCW training and development
- Inequalities in educational opportunities
- Facilitation of workforce mobility and recognition of professional qualifications in oncology
- Safeguarded working conditions in cancer care

The medical device supplier

Even manufacturers of cancer treatment products can provide support for patients and HCWs in helping to restore high quality cancer care.

In chemotherapy, vascular access management solutions that reduce treatment time are essential, not only to improve comfort to the patient, but also to allow HCWs to be more efficient with their time, freeing them up to treat other patients. Implanted ports that require minimal flushing, as well as training and imaging support in proper vascular access device placement, can give HCWs time for more value-adding tasks, such as attending to an increased patient capacity.

As a global leader in medical technology, BD is a proud supporter of the European Cancer Organisation (ECO) and the TIME TO ACT campaign to urgently address the challenges that COVID-19 has presented to cancer care.

You and your role

Together, we must be committed to doing what is necessary to deliver safe, effective oncology solutions to reduce the patient backlog and steady the path for post-pandemic cancer care.

Click here to read the article on BD IV News

https://eu.bd.com/iv-news/news-innovation/cancer-care-in-a-covid-19-climate-who-can-make-a-difference/

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